



Divrei Torah

by

B'nei Mitzvah
Belsize Square Synagogue
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B'reishit — Sam Spencer

About a year ago things changed at cheder. I was informed that it was time to start preparation for my Bar Mitzvah. Fear set in, as the scale of the task hit home. It all got real! Fast-forward to this morning and after a year spent studying my portion with Rabbi Altshuler, Cantor Heller and Adam Rynhold, I feel proud of my achievements.

B'reisheet is the first book of the Torah or Genesis in English. It tells us how the universe was created and it is here that we learn about the first human beings, Adam and Eve.

Many of you, like me, might question certain parts of the story e.g. was the Universe really created in seven days? However, the Torah never pretends to be a science book. The purpose of the Torah is to help us understand and interpret the meaning of life. It provides a 'framework of behaviour' for mankind.

The first theme in B'reisheet, is that of Temptation. Adam and Eve are explicitly warned not to eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Eve ignores the warning. Her desire for the fruit is too strong and she disobeys G-d. She eats the fruit. She uses her free will to make a choice and gives into temptation. The consequences of her actions are that she and Adam are severely punished by G-d.

Using our free will wisely, resisting temptation and being accountable for our actions are all extremely relevant concepts today. The media regularly warns us about our 'catastrophic impact on the planet'. Threats of global warming and climate change challenge us daily.

The second theme I believe is about having a deeper understanding of yourself but also of your place and role in the world. It's about having the maturity to behave in a responsible way.

So, this brings me to my next thoughts. I know that I am growing up and I know that with this "Coming of Age" and being Bar Mitzvah there will be challenges and opportunities. I am moving from a phase of childhood to early adulthood and the essence of Bar Mitzvah is of 'becoming a man'.

Another metaphor from B'reisheet that I discussed with Rabbi Altshuler is the transition from innocence to knowledge. I recognize that it's not enough to simply know more as you get older. With knowledge comes a certain level of responsibility and accountability for one's actions. I am ready to try to be more responsible. I am ready to accept the mantle of early adulthood and to try to carve my role out in our family, in the community and in the wider world.

I do know that it won't be easy and I know, like Adam and Eve, there will be temptations. My mum seems to believe that 'once a lobbos, always a lobos' but I hope that with the support and love of everyone here today and with Mum and Dad behind me, I can grow into a man who is kind, loyal and who learns from life's ups and downs.

I hope that I can live a life of integrity and accountability; to be the sort of person who considers others and who has a sense of purpose and responsibility for a world that is for us to look after, both for my generation and for generations to come.

Shabbat Shalom

Noah—Alice Salmon

In this week's Torah portion, we read the great story about Noah. G-d intended to destroy the world through a great flood because he didn't like the behaviour of the humans he created. Noah built a massive ark to save his family and every animal by taking a pair of every species but why mosquitos? What on earth was G-d thinking? Had Noah asked for my help, I would have thrown in a couple of unicorns!

After the flood, G-d made a covenant with us, promising never to destroy the world again and rainbows remind us of that covenant. Religious Jews actually recite a blessing called *Zocher Habrit* every time they see a rainbow. It translates as "remember the covenant".

Let me share my ideas on today's Torah reading which is known as a sidra the Hebrew word for portion or order.

Although our modern world is very different to that of Noah's time, we do face our own difficulties. To meet our needs, we are cutting down forests, burning oil and polluting the oceans. Our planet is getting warmer every year but still we continue to disrespect our environment. G-d did promise not to destroy our world again, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't carefully look after it.

I learnt a thought-provoking story recently. I'll *let you decide whether it actually happened or not...!*

A religious man was travelling by sea to the Holy Land when suddenly a huge wave hit the ship and sunk it. Luckily, he found a plank of wood to hold onto. As if by magic, a fishing-boat appeared out of nowhere. The fisherman told the man to get on board and that he was travelling to Turkey. However, the man answered, "No, thank you, G-d is going to save me and take me to the Holy Land". So, the fisherman went away. After a couple of hours, the man was exhausted. Guess What? As if by magic, another even larger boat mysteriously appeared travelling to Lebanon. That sailor also told the religious man to climb-aboard. Again, the man repeated, "Thanks, but I'm relying on G-d to rescue me and get me to the Holy Land". So the boat went on its way.

Sadly, the man drowned. He got to heaven extremely angry with G-d. He asked him, "You must have heard my prayers? Why didn't you rescue me? Haven't I always led a good and religious life"? G-d answered calmly. "I sent a small boat to rescue you, but you turned him away. I then sent an even nicer boat to rescue you. You turned that down as well! What were you expecting me to do...Send a cruise ship to take you in luxury to the Holy Land"?

We learn from this story that we can't just wait for things to happen. We have to take our own initiative while trusting in G-d's assistance through life's journey.

We need to start making our own plans to save the planet for future generations. If we act quickly, hopefully, we will be able to avoid having to build our own ark.

Shabbat Shalom!

Lech Lecha—Zoe Cutner

The parsha this Shabbat, Lech Lecha, begins with Abraham leaving Haran because G-d promises the land of Canaan to him and his descendants. As they pass through Egypt, Abraham instructs Sarah to pretend she is his sister, just in case Pharaoh wants to kill Abraham and take Sarah as his wife. Later Abraham rescues his brother's son Lot after he is kidnapped and taken hostage by enemy kings.

Was Abraham a good person? This is a very interesting question, as at first it would seem obvious. He left his home in pursuit of a better life. He saved himself and his wife from Pharaoh. He rescued his nephew Lot when he was captured.

Another interesting aspect about Abraham is whether it is okay to tell a lie for the sake of the greater good. Parents and teachers are always saying 'don't lie'. But they also say, 'it's okay to tell white lies', which basically means you can tell a small untruth to avoid hurting someone's feelings, for example, telling your friend you like their dress, even though you actually think it's really ugly.

Abraham lies to Pharaoh about Sarah being his wife. Abraham had good intentions when he told this lie, and he didn't mean to hurt anyone. It ended up having a good impact; however, the lie could have turned out very badly, as Pharaoh could have become angry with Abraham and killed him anyway.

When Lot is attacked and kidnapped by enemy kings, Abraham goes and saves him, and even declines the reward he is offered. Abraham actually finds Lot rather annoying, but he still rescues him because he is his nephew. This shows Abraham was a good person who stood up for what he believed was right.

The topic of lying is complicated. People often tell lies, trying to make others feel better, or to get away with things they shouldn't. On the one hand, you could make someone's day with a compliment you don't mean. On the other hand, you could hurt their feelings and then they would lose their trust in you. The only way a lie can ever be considered good is if the intentions are honourable, but it is still a very debatable subject.

In today's world, there are lots of people like Abraham who stand up for what they believe, for example Greta Thunberg and the protesters in Hong Kong, even when it means being criticised by people.

So, how does this concept apply to me? Well, if I was faced with the question 'do you like my dress?', I would consider how well I knew the person asking. If it was one of my close friends and I knew they wouldn't be offended if I said it didn't suit them, then I would say that. However, if it was a random person in a shop, I would probably say 'yes' because I don't want to offend them.

This summer I went to Israel with my family and we visited Yad Vashem, I was really touched by what I saw there. Therefore, I decided that I wanted to twin my Bat Mitzvah with someone who was killed before she had the chance to reach this milestone in her life. I am honouring the memory of Chawa Abrasz, a child from Poland born in 1933. She died in Auschwitz at the age of 10.

In Nazi Germany there were many people who didn't stand up for what they believed was wrong when Jews were being taken away to concentration camps. Fortunately, there were a few who did like Oscar Schindler who helped many Jews escape. By thinking of Chawa and Abraham during my Bat Mitzvah it reminds me that, while it might be okay to tell the odd white lie if my intentions are good, there will be times when I must be honest about what is happening in a situation and stand up for what I believe is right, even if this makes me vulnerable to what others might say.

Toldot — George Cohen

The Torah portion this shabbat is Toldot from the book of Genesis meaning history or generations.

The story begins by describing the birth of twin brothers Esau and Jacob who are born to Rebecca and Isaac. Esau is rugged and out-doorsy. Jacob is a wholesome, gentle person. Esau is favoured by his dad and Jacob is favoured by his mum.

The important points seem to be that when they were young, Esau sold his birth right to Jacob for a pot of stew. When he is older, Esau brings pain to his parents by marrying two Hittite women. Then, with the help of his mum, Jacob double crosses Esau and tricks Isaac, who is old and blind, to receive his blessing.

So, it is even our great hero Jacob who is portrayed here in a less than heroic light.

Each generation looks up to people who do great things. However, doing great things doesn't make you a great person, learning from mistakes is the best way to become a more rounded individual.

Looking at the family in my portion you can see that, although these people are important players in the Jewish religion, Isaac was Abraham's son, they have many flaws. They are portrayed as a dysfunctional family who only value themselves. This demonstrates that even revered people can be flawed just the same as anyone.

It is also evident that this family would have had to learn from their mistakes to become the great people who we see them as today. This is a positive message as it demonstrates that anyone can change, given time and a reason to do it.

Being a Bar Mitzvah today enables me to identify with the culture of the religion and the roots of the Jewish people. It helps me understand parts of who I am.

Shabbat Shalom

Bo—Phoebe Jerome

The name of the parsha this Shabbat is Bo. It tells the most famous story of the Jewish people, the first story any Jewish child learns as it is growing up. The story is of the Exodus, the delivery of the Israelites from a life of slavery under the Pharaoh in Egypt and the beginning of the walk to the Promised Land. Pharaoh had refused to set the Children of Israel free, so G-d sent ten plagues to try and change his mind.

The parsha describes the three final plagues, each one nastier than the one before, starting with the 8th plague, Locusts, followed by Darkness and the 10th plague, Death of the First Born. G-d struck down all first-borns in the land of Egypt from the first-born of King Pharaoh to the first-born of a prisoner in the dungeon and even the firstborn of the cows in the fields, exactly as Moses had warned. Pharaoh finally got the message and agreed to let the Israelites go.

So, why am I so proud to have studied such a dark chapter in our history? Well, the Exodus from Egypt is one of the most important events in the early history of the Jewish people. It was really the birth of our people. It shaped our ancestors and gave them the building blocks for the rules and ways of our culture.

This is very clear after the grizzly description of those last three plagues, that the tone of the Torah portion changes and gives instructions to ensure the commemoration of these events. It mentions the sacrifice of the lamb and the eating of matzah, both of which will become very important parts of the festival of Passover.

One day, as a Jewish woman, it might be me laying the Passover table. Just as the Israelites are commanded to tell their children about the meaning of Pesach one day, hopefully, I will be telling my own children. This means telling them about the lessons I have learnt in becoming Bat Mitzvah and in Bo, the story of the Exodus and the meaning of freedom itself.

These are the rituals that help us feel that we are personally part of Jewish history and after today, Passover will always have a special place in my heart....

Also... *maybe it IS a good thing not to have been the first born child after all!!!*

Shabbat Shalom everyone

Mishpatim—Harry Solnick

Shabbat shalom everybody. Today's parsha is Mishpatim. It's all about laws. Laws are one of the most important things in Judaism. Mishpatim presents the laws that govern the Jewish community. Some are very specific, for instance directives to care for distressed animals. And some are more general such as you must not murder anyone. Upon hearing all these laws Moses gathered people around Mount Sinai and declared, "All the things G-d has commanded we will do".

For me one of the most interesting themes in Mishpatim concerns laws being introduced that even Kings could be subjected to, which prevented bias. (This ended up contributing to the demise of the monarchy in Judaism.) Another theme that really drew me in were the laws about fairness and justice which even governed things like slavery. At this point slavery was a very sensitive subject because even though the Jews had been subjected to slavery in Egypt, they kept slaves themselves. Slavery amongst the Jews was purely an economic arrangement. For instance, you could be enslaved to pay off a debt. Interestingly, in Jewish society at this time, slaves only kept this status for seven years. If someone wanted to stay a slave after seven years, they had to have that status forever and be marked on the ear because the law frowned on this choice.

One of the most positive laws in Mishpatim is about welcoming the stranger. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks says, "Why should you not hate the stranger, asks the Torah? Because you once stood where he stands now. You know the heart of the stranger because you were once a stranger in the land of Egypt. If you are human, so is he; if he is less than human, so are you."

Rabbi Sacks' words feel very relevant to me. In the UK we are often not welcoming to immigrants who might be escaping war or persecution. Sometimes it can be difficult to welcome people. *A stranger can be anyone from someone new joining the school to someone walking past you on the street.* For example, if someone has a different background or nationality, we can see them as aliens which builds a sense of paranoia or fear. But they are not aliens, they are human beings. One way to overcome this feeling is to remember that Jews have not been welcomed numerous times throughout history.

My year of Bar Mitzvah learning has made me appreciate what it means to be part of the long and ancient history of the Jewish people. We've been through pain and suffering, for example, slavery in Egypt and the Holocaust. When I think of these times when the Jews have had to flee places where they were in danger; it makes me not want others to feel unwelcome.

Mishpatim, my parsha, has helped me see the world through others' eyes. The Torah and its wise and ancient laws have made me understand my new responsibilities to others, to my community and has made me want to contribute to tackling the suffering and prejudice in our world.

Vayikra—Joseph Sanders

The Torah portion this Shabbat, Vayikra, is the first portion of the book of Leviticus, which includes the laws by which a Jew should live. This particular portion is all about sacrifices: it explains the different types of sacrifice, how to execute the perfect sacrifice and in what circumstances you should make a sacrifice.

Sacrifices were made to please G-d or as guilt offerings where you had done something wrong or as well-being offerings. Different sacrifices were prescribed for wealthy people and for poorer people, e.g. wealthy people had to offer a beast from the herd—a bull or a sheep; whereas those who couldn't afford this, could instead offer pigeons, turtledoves or even grains.

The rituals were set out in great detail with elaborate rules for both animal sacrifices and grain offerings e.g. grain offerings could only be unleavened and were mixed with oil and frankincense. The majority of descriptions however are about animal sacrifices – and these are, to be honest, pretty gruesome and gory. There are lots of descriptions of pinching off birds' heads, separating out animals' fatty entrails and splashing blood on all sides of the altar, images that bring to mind T.V. crime scenes. But despite these grisly depictions, it turns out that Leviticus is actually the first book of the Torah that Jewish children traditionally learn, as it contains all the laws of Jewish purity.

The question is, what does this have to do with me today as a Jewish boy in the 21st century with an interest in protecting the environment and not slaughtering animals?

I have considered what sacrifice means, why these sacrifices were important to Jews in earlier centuries and what sort of sacrifices would be appropriate or relevant today.

The word sacrifice in Hebrew is *korban*, the same root as the word for 'close'. The purpose of a sacrifice was to bring people closer to G-d and in some cases, closer to their community. In giving up something that was very precious e.g. a prime specimen of livestock sacrificing it with specific rituals, a person would feel they had shown respect and loyalty to G-d and would therefore feel closer to Him, as a consequence.

In the early days of Judaism, all the surrounding cultures would also have been carrying out animal sacrifices and so this sort of ritual worship would have been a tangible way to show dedication and mark spiritual growth.

However, in the Torah, and in lots of commentaries since then, not everyone agreed that animal sacrifice was necessary or appropriate to show closeness to G-d and after the destruction of the second Temple, this form of worship stopped as there was no longer a suitable place to carry it out. It was replaced mainly by prayer, which is a sacrifice of time to become closer to G-d.

In my life, I have thought about what sort of things I sacrifice, or at least I ought to sacrifice, in order to make me closer to people e.g. when I am sitting at the dinner table and my phone beeps with a new Instagram message, clearly I want to read it but I know I should give up the urge to leap up and respond immediately if I want to feel closer to my family. I admit it was a bit of a struggle to think of many more things that I do actually give up at the moment, whereas, I know my parents regularly give up their time for me! So, now that I am a Bar Mitzvah, as a Jewish adult, I will need to consider how to make a few more sacrifices!

I think the overall message of sacrifice is that in giving something up and feeling closer to G-d or to my family and friends as a consequence, the end result is that I and they will have gained something far more important in the long run.

Naso—Daisy Kidson

Shabbat shalom everyone. I think it's so special that even though we cannot be together as a congregation in person, I still get to share all my hard work with you today. I will be talking about my Torah portion Naso which is from the book of Bamidbar, or numbers. This book follows on from the Israelites' exodus from slavery in Egypt, when they left in a hurry after the 10 Plagues. I am speaking to you now in very different circumstances to those we imagined for my Batmitzvah, because of a new plague that has forced us all into an exodus from our normality.

The portion also contains the Birkat Kohanim, the priestly blessing, given to Moses by G-d as a blessing for the People of Israel. This is one of the most frequently said Jewish prayers and used by Jewish parents to bless their children on Friday night before the Shabbat meal.

May the Lord bless you and keep you
May the Lord make his face shine on you and show you his favour
May the Lord lift up his face towards you and give you peace.

The first line speaks of safety and security. The second talks of spiritual blessing and wisdom. The last line craves peace of mind and soul. These words were found in silver amulets excavated in Jerusalem and dated back to the 9th century BCE, which was in the time of the first Temple. Despite being the oldest prayer, it is more relevant than ever now. We all need to stay at home to protect ourselves and those around us by limiting contact so we can't catch or pass on an invisible disease.

The blessing also strives for wisdom. Thanks to modern technology, I have been able to continue my studies and education, both for school and my preparation for becoming Batmitzvah. Technology has helped me stay connected with friends and family and made it possible for you to join me today as I become a Jewish adult. Thank you to Susanna for teaching me my portion and Haftorah and always supporting me even if I got it wrong, which happened a lot, and thank you to Cantor Paul and the Rabbi for believing in me and coming with me on this journey.

This Batmitzvah is very special to me. At a young age I decided not to have one but then I went to some of my friend's Batmitzvahs and saw what a special moment it was for them and their family that they will never forget.

In this quarantine me and my sister Bella have bonded a lot and I would like to thank her for being a wonderful sister and putting up with me. I would also like to thank my parents and grandparents for being so supportive of me and being proud of me every step of the way when I learned a new verse or blessing. And, special thanks to my mum for helping record this Batmitzvah so I could share it with you today. I'm so looking forward to being able to see you all in shul again.

Shelach Lecha—Nina Freudenheim

Shabbat Shalom Everyone. The Torah portion I am reading from is Shelach Lecha from the Book of Numbers, Chapter 13.

In this portion, Moses is commanded by G-d to send twelve spies to scout the land of Israel and see if it is conquerable. When the twelve spies return, the majority of their reports are negative, but two spies believe, although the land seems daunting, it is still conquerable.

In response to the 10 spies' negativity, G-d wants to sentence all those who had travelled with Moses on the way to The Promise Land, to death because he believes that **that** generation in the wilderness was too discouraged and negative. This death sentence applied to all but Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who had positive reports. Moses attempted to reason with G-d. He argued that people might see him as weak if he failed to bring everyone into The land of Israel and G-d conceded to his argument, changing his punishment so that all of that generation minus the two spies, would wander in the desert for a forty years and only their children would be able to enter the Promised Land.

An important lesson I learnt while reading this portion was that optimism is extremely important. G-d punished most of the Israelites because they were negative, while they saw the Promise Land as a big cloud, Joshua and Caleb realised that the bigger the cloud, the bigger the silver lining. I can definitely agree that positivity is key, especially when faced with a lifetime of being teased by siblings.

As I read the portion however, I started to question whether G-d's actions were necessary. To wander aimlessly in the desert for 40 years is not a light punishment, it seems cruel and harsh and yet even after all G-d had done to get the Israelites out of Egypt, freeing them and guiding them through the desert, they still doubted him. They abandoned their faith and loyalty in him and for that they were punished. This I can understand, they lost faith in The Promised Land, so why should they be gifted it.

Another important message rings true from this story. G-d is powerful and almighty, he does not need to send the spies, he wants us to be able to discover things alone. The Haftorah literally begins with the words 'shelah lekha' which means send the spies for 'your own sake'. G-d is not going to advise you on every decision, he's not going to be with you at every turn. We need to be able to be independent. Something which I can relate to, I wish I could be more independent, going to school without my sister would be a start seeing as she is always running late. G-d is telling us that our own decisions and actions make up our own experiences. This I can understand, my own choice to take French this year means I am the one who must suffer through the lectures about grammar, not G-d because he wisely did not make that decision. Independence is important in life; G-d is trying to teach us a lesson.

I have learnt through the Torah portion and Haftorah, that even though the Torah was written thousands and thousands of years ago, it's moral stories and lessons are still relevant and apply to my life today. Though the text is in a different language, written from right to left, cocooned in a Torah mantle and adorned with a breastplate, I can still relate and understand its teachings and for that I feel grateful.

Chukat/Balak—Yosh Gaberman

Shabbat shalom. I would like to thank everyone for being here today. I have to personally thank the Rabbi, the Cantor and Joe Hacker who helped me to prepare for my Barmitz-vah. I would also like to thank my parents, especially my Dad, who annoyed me everyday to study and practice when I wanted to just play video games.

My Torah portion is filled with so many things I could talk about, that if I did we would be here for a very long time, so I picked out something I felt connected with and that is the story of when after journeying through the desert, the people of Israel arrived in the wilderness of Zin. At that time Miriam died and the people of Israel were thirsty for water. G-d tells Moses to command a rock to give water. Moses was angry with the rebellious Israelites and hit the stone. Water came forth but G-d told Moses that he and Aaron would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land as he did not have patience.

The theme in this is whether the punishments inflicted by G-d were fair or unfair. One thing that I find fascinating about Judaism is that, unlike Christianity with Jesus and Islam with Mohammed, which are both presented as perfect human beings, Moses is represented as a man with flaws. In Chukat Balak the punishments Moses faced were much greater than the Israelites. The punishments were more extreme because he was a leader and as a leader, he should set a better example. I believe that we need to understand that leaders can also be imperfect and are really just like the rest of us with flaws.

The theme for that part of Chukat Balak is still relevant today as the punishment to Moses happened when he lost patience and we can think of it having parallels with our need to be patient with the corona virus and that we also must trust our leaders and scientists to guide us in the right direction, even when we cannot see how it is helping.

I especially picked out the part of the Torah portion as I felt I could relate to it personally as I know the social distancing was hard for me. I felt bored and frustrated by not being allowed to hang out with my friends. I needed patience to help me get through it, but like Moses, I have flaws and I lost patience multiple times and got frustrated. I have learnt from the experience and it has made me a more forgiving and patient human being.

Ki Tavo—Jack Loison

Shabbat Shalom everyone! It is so lovely for me to be talking to you today from our beautiful Synagogue because, just a few months or even weeks ago, this seemed like an impossibility. And so, I am truly grateful to be here at Belsize Square this morning. And this gratitude links really well to Ki Tavo - the Torah portion that we have just read.

My Parsha of Ki Tavo has many themes running through it but two of the main themes are particularly important to Jewish people – Blessings, which we say all the time, whether we are at home, at Shul or even out and about for some particularly religious people and marriage which I am guessing most Jewish people hope for at some point in their lives, even though it might seem ages away for a 13 year old Bar Mitzvah boy like me! As I have studied the text in my lessons with my teacher Adam, I have come to realise that these themes are both linked by an overarching theme of gratitude. Let me explain.

Ki Tavo begins with a selection of blessings including “Blessed shall you be in the city” and “Blessed shall you be in the country”, “Blessed shall you be in your comings” and “Blessed shall you be in your goings”. Ordinarily these blessings don’t seem to be particularly special or anything to shout about or appreciate. However, given the whole Covid-19 pandemic, I think that we should definitely be grateful for these blessings. I mean, a few months ago, we weren’t able to come or go anywhere as we pleased, never mind the city or the country. So, as you can see, I am very grateful for blessings, especially those that we read about in Ki Tavo this morning. And, I am sure all of us will be even more grateful when we will be able to come and go in the city and in the country as we please, safely and freely, in the future.

The other theme that I would like to talk to you about from Ki Tavo is marriage. I am lucky to be able to look at my parents and grandparents and see that they have successful marriages full of happiness, laughter and a few arguments here and there. But, most importantly, love. They are grateful for each other and for their children and grandchildren and I am very grateful to have all of them. My parents have given me two amazing siblings. Well, they aren’t always amazing but I have to admit I do love them both lots, although this might be the only time I say it on record! My parents have given me, Zoe and Benji a wonderful life full of love, laughter and learning. We have everything we need (plus lots that we don’t necessarily need because we are a bit spoilt!) and I know they both work really hard to give us all of this and I am truly grateful.

I thought I would end this D’var Torah about gratitude by sharing a few other things that I am grateful for.

I am grateful for my family. It has been really tricky not being able to see everyone over the last few months and I can’t wait to give you all a hug soon. I am grateful for my friends. Not being at school or going to Cheder or Scouts has been really tough and I am really looking forward to seeing some of my friends over the coming few days as we get back to the “new normal”.

I am grateful for Belsize Square – The Synagogue has played and continues to play such an important part in mine and my family’s lives and I am really pleased that Rabbi Altshuler and Cantor Heller have been able to officiate this morning – Thank you both for all your help and guidance throughout my Bar Mitzvah process.

I am grateful for my teachers – Adam has been an amazing Bar Mitzvah teacher and I could not have got through this process without his patience and support.

And, finally, I am grateful for football and books – I couldn’t let this morning pass without commenting on my beloved Spurs who I am hoping will have another good or at least better season this year and also without recommending that everyone read all the Harry Potter books at least three times over as I have done!

As Ki Tavo teaches us and as I hope my D’var Torah has shown you, I have a lot to be grateful for. Thank you for listening.

Nitzvaim/Vayeilech—Noah Jacobson

Shabbat Shalom!

This Shabbat the Torah portion is Nitzavim/Vayeilech and it is from the book of Deuteronomy.

This parsha tells the story of Moses approaching the land of Israel and not being allowed to lead the Jewish people into the Promised Land and Joshua is appointed to lead the people instead.

This parsha teaches us about the importance of free will and consent. How, when faced with choice, we should always be striving to make the right choice. It teaches us that our decisions should always revolve around family and helping the Jewish people, as well as humanity.

Moshe was successful at leading the Jewish people, but when he angrily struck the rock, he made a bad choice! The consequence of this was grave and G-d told Moshe he would not be allowed into Israel with his people. This shows that you should never make destructive choices. Life won't always go your way or be in your favour but even in the face of disappointment, you must always make good choices. Your decisions should be life enhancing and never cause harm to yourself or others.

Before the people go into Israel, Moses appoints a new leader, Joshua. Moshe tells Joshua to make sure that the Jewish people want to go into Israel. Moshe believes that the Jewish people should have the freedom to consent to enter Israel. On the other hand, G-d says that even if they don't want to go into Israel, the Jewish people must enter the Promised Land and that Joshua must lead them no matter what. This highlights the importance of knowledge and education for all and not just for the few. How the Torah is a book for all to study and learn from and how each one of the Jewish people should have the knowledge to make an informed choice.

For me, as I become Bar Mitzvah now, my parsha has shown me the importance of always making good choices. As I become a man in the eyes of the Jewish religion, it has encouraged me to consider how my decisions have consequences. Nitzavim/Vayeilech has shown me how important it is to make informed and positive choices that are life enhancing and not destructive. The clearest message that I have taken from this parsha is to always choose life!

B'NEI MITZVAH 2020-2021

17 October 2020	Max Slotover	Bereisheet
24 October 2020	Rio Beckwith Leever	Noah
31 October 2020	Archie Gee	Lech Lecha
7 November 2020	Harry Abrahams	Vayera
21 November 2020	Jack Walsh	Toldot
12 December 2020	Toby Buchler	Vayeishev
19 December 2020	Celia Krikler	MIkkeitz
9 January 2021	Max Chalfen	Shemot
20 March 2021	Lily Wantman	Vayikra
8 May 2021	Charlie Lewis	Behar/Bechuckotai
22 May 2021	Nicholas & Jonathan Singer	Naso
12 June 2021	Ruby Keve	Korach
19 June 2021	Poppy Spencer	Chukkat
26 June 2021	Joseph Walford	Balak
3 July 2021	Max Charles	Pinchas
10 July 2021	Jack Lesser	Mattot/Massei



CHAGIM DATES 5781

Rosh Hashanah	1 st Night – Friday 18 September 1 st Day – Saturday 19 September 2 nd Night – Saturday 19 September 2 nd Day – Sunday 20 September
Kol Nidrei Yom Kippur	Sunday 27 September Monday 28 September
Succot	1 st Night – Friday 2 October 1 st Day – Saturday 3 October 2 nd Night – Saturday 3 October 2 nd Day – Sunday 4 October
Shemini Atzereth	Erev – Friday 9 October Day – Saturday 10 October
Simchat Torah	Erev – Saturday 10 October Day – Sunday 11 October
Chanukah	First Candle – Thursday 10 December Last Candle – Thursday 17 December
Purim	Thursday 26 February
Pesach	1st Seder Night—Saturday 27 March 1st Day - Sunday 28 March 2nd Seder Night - Sunday 28 March 2nd Day -- Monday 29 March 7th Night—Friday 2 April 7th Day—Saturday 3 April 8th Night— Saturday 3 April 8th Day—Sunday 4 April
Shavuot	1st Night—Sunday 16 May 1st Day—Monday 17 May 2nd Night—Monday 17 May 2nd Day—Tuesday 18 May

Thank you to everyone who
has been involved in the
production of this booklet.

Copies are available from the Synagogue Office