

Mattea's Bat Mitzvah Speech
February 13, 2016

Shavua tov.

I would like to thank you for joining me tonight as I celebrate becoming a bat mitzvah. Around twelve years ago in New York City, my parents lived in a small apartment with one cat. They had been living there for around 5 years and decided they wanted to have a child. They had the potential of having a family and had to start somewhere. I was a good place to start.

They had me at NYU hospital on November 14, 2003. So there I was, my mom and my dad holding me in their arms and giving me my name, Mattea. I was a little baby, with a lot of hair, who had the potential to do great things. But what would I be? So much potential to be realized. This theme of potential and reality has a lot to do with what I'd like to speak with you about tonight.

Becoming a Bat Mitzvah literally means daughter of the mitzvot - the commandments. More practically, it means a young woman who has become the age when she is responsible for the mitzvot. I have to take all of them seriously, as it is no longer my parents' responsibility. All 613 mitzvot, such as fasting on Yom Kippur, hearing the shofar, giving tzedaka and not speaking lashon hora. I could go on and on, but today, I am going to take one mitzvah to focus on as symbolic of the entire 613. That mitzvah is Havdalah. Havdalah, which means separation, separates Shabbat from the rest of the days of the week.

Who would have imagined 12 years ago in NYU hospital that we would be here today talking about Havdalah..... but it was a potential...

To better understand the mitzvah of Havdalah, it is helpful to understand what it is. Havdalah, at its essence, is a blessing. What then is a blessing? The purpose of a blessing is to take something from its potential and make it an actual. As I was mentioning before, you can see that potentials and actuals have a lot to do with my life. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik derives this idea - that a blessing takes something from its potential to its actual - from the first time that the word Baruch appears in the Torah. It says...

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֶתֶם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְכִבְשֶׁהָ וּרְדּוּ בְּדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל־חַיָּה הָרֹמֶשֶׂת עַל־הָאָרֶץ

G-d said to Adam and Eve: “Go have children, raise them and have them do things to civilize the earth”. This was just like my parents. They had me and then had to raise me to be a civilized child. That is where we get the concept of a blessing, being a potential that we have to make into actual.

Another idea of a blessing is that it is a realization of something good or beneficial. For example, when our parents make a blessing on their children during Shabbat, they realize how amazing we are. They have the realization of family, kids and being together. It is a happy realization, which is made possible through a blessing.

Just to sum up, we have two ideas of what a blessing is. One, a blessing is a potential that is turned into an actual. Two, is that a blessing is the realization of something happy and meaningful.

When these two ideas are combined, it means that the transformation from potential to actual can also be what a person realizes from the experience. I’d like to give one example of how this relates to my family. Shabbat. My family and I get together on Shabbat with grandparents, cousins, and friends. We do the Shabbat blessings together and, through this, realize how lucky we are to all be together as one big family and community.

Now that we understand the idea of a blessing, we are going to move onto Havdalah. Havdalah, as I mentioned earlier, is a blessing. The theme of Havdalah is taking things to a higher level. I am going to explain how this theme applies to each one of the four blessings in Havdalah.

First, we do the blessing on the wine, or in my case, grape juice. We have wine on special occasions, such as Shabbat, weddings, Passover and Sukkot. Jews mark special times and occasions with a blessing over the wine. The idea is that we make time special. We give it structure and meaning. We mark the times that are special in Jewish history and ones that are special in terms of our relationship to G-d. So the cup of wine symbolizes that we, Jews, make time special.

The second blessing is on the spices. Spices have an important role in Havdalah. The job of spices is to cushion our fall from the elevated spiritual heights of Shabbat. This

blessing helps us to appreciate our spirituality and the inner part of us. Shabbat has its laws, but it also allows us to pay attention to the soul and spirit of the day. In this blessing, the spices are directed to a physical body, the nose, that is right next to the emotional center of the brain. It allows us to target the spirit through a physical door.

The third blessing is on the fire. This blessing is about the anniversary of fire. On Adam's first day, after it became dark, Adam became scared, frightened that there would be no more light. G-d gave Adam fire and light - a way to bring light and warmth into the cold and dark. Fire was a gift given after the end of shabbat. During Havdalah, we remember this event by making a blessing on the fire. This was the first time a person controlled the environment.

Last but not least, we have the fourth blessing - the blessing of Havdalah itself. As I discussed, the blessing of Havdalah is taking things to a higher level. Taking secular things and making them holy. I am now going to read the translation of the Havdalah blessing in English.

“Thank you G-d who separates between Holy and ordinary, between light and darkness, between Israel and other nations, between the seventh day and the other six days of creation. Thank you G-d for making Holy separate from ordinary.”

This separation between holy and ordinary is important. There are many resources in our day-to-day lives that can be ordinary and hurtful, or holy and special. The choice is ours. One example of something we all use every day that can be ordinary, Holy, or is Instagram. Snapchat. Or in more general terms, technology.

We can use Instagram and Snapchat for writing mean things and making others upset. Or, we can use them to take things to a higher level, like Havdalah, and post photos with family and friends and be supportive of others. Technology has the power to gather us together to do good things. Such as the ALS ice bucket challenge that everyone participated in two years ago. This wonderful idea spread through quickly through technology and raised \$115 million through this challenge. That is a very good example of taking things to a higher level.

We are now going to take a moment and recite the four blessings of Havdalah.

Beginning paragraph

Wine

Spice

Fire

Havdalah

As I was saying earlier, the Havdalah marks the separation between Holy time and ordinary time. We Jews also have another kind of holiness, not of time but of space. This may sound confusing but bear with me. This kind of holiness was discussed at great length in this morning's Torah reading. In the Temple of Solomon, they had special windows that were wide on the inside, and narrow on the outside. This was meant to symbolize that the Holy space had its own light that it projects outward to the rest of the world.

My family has a particular interest in Holy Spaces. There is a picture of my great great grandfather, David Davis, who was sitting where my mom and dad are sitting right now. He is sitting together with the other members of Schara Tzedek, when they built this building in 1946, almost exactly 70 years ago. Ever since, our family has been committed to helping and supporting the shul. My other great grandfather, Leo Krell, sponsored many of the prayer books within the synagogue. And on my dad's side, my great great grandparents, Sophie and Ben Karpman, were founders of the Ah-dah-th Israel synagogue in Montreal. And my Bubby Ettie and Zeide Reggie were the first to get married there.

Both the story of the Temple and the story of my family remind me that it is important to cultivate the light in this room and make sure that it is shined outward to the entire world. The holy times and places remind us that we have to take the many blessings of our world - family, friendship, food, education, money, technology, talent, skills - and raise them to a higher level. They are handed to me today as a Bat Mitzvah as a potential, and I will have to make them into something actual and special.

Thank You's

Now, I have a few thank yous to say to wrap up my speech.

First, I would like to thank Rabbi Rosenblatt for taking time out of his busy schedule each week and teaching me about Havdalah and its meaning. I enjoyed our weekly discussions.

I would like to thank my friends for being so supportive and for always being there over the years. You guys rock!

I would like to thank all of the people who came from out of town to celebrate with us today. And all my amazing cousins, aunts and uncles.

I am also so lucky to have all 4 of my amazing grandparents with me here today. Thank you so much and I love you guys. I look forward to you spoiling me for many years ahead.

Now to my two younger brothers, I would like to thank them for never being annoying at all, never fighting at all and never being mean to me. Thank you I love you two. I look forward to be an example of perfection, for you guys to look up to for many years to come.

Now, my mom and dad. Thank you to my dad for putting my life to music and for my mom putting my life to style. I will keep this short because I don't want my dad to cry. But you guys are my everything. You brought me up to be the person I am today. I love you guys. Thank you.

And thank you everybody for coming tonight to celebrate such a special night for me and my family.