

If it's true that love gives you strength, I stand here tonight soaking up the superhuman powers. I am so fortunate and grateful to have you all here and in my life. Becoming a Bat Mitzvah in Israel meant more than just a fabulous family vacation, which it was. It was very meaningful for me to mark my transition from childhood to adulthood in our homeland, a country that symbolizes growth, development, courage and collaboration. I walked on the same roads as King David did, I touched the walls the Israelites built with their bare hands and I was in the same sacred spaces that our ancestors built and our fathers and mothers fought for. What a privilege!

My Bat Mitzvah took place 3 weeks ago in the beautiful biblical reserve of Neot Kedomim in Israel. It was a gorgeous day – the sun was shining, the views were spectacular, I was surrounded by my family taking everything in while in the background all you could hear were... loud, really loud automatic weapons passionately firing. These sounds piercing the air were coming from the military training facility down the hill. How symbolic! Welcome to Israel - the land of contrasts.

People who hold most passion, love and patriotism for their country wish they could move away. The greatest freedoms are available in a country that finds the most attractive people are in dirty green army uniform. The same people who want to kill each other over a mishap in a line up or a parking spot, in a second will save each other's life on the front lines. The most spiritual place in the world has turned so many people off religion. It is happy and sad, the safest and most vulnerable.

This intense environment produces the most laid back and spontaneous people I ever met. They live with an intoxicating mixture of passion and hope, sadly laced with an exhausting struggle. There were 22 terrorist attacks in the 3 weeks we were there.

I was amazed to see how life goes on, how people adapt and push through. But I learnt very quickly not to confuse it with unaffected or numb – they are not. The impact is complex and meant an opportunity for me to learn some life lessons from this very complicated country. Lessons that capsule the qualities I need in order to be the adult I want to be.

I stand here today feeling a little bit wiser, ready to take on responsibility for my actions moving forward as I do my best to figure out right from wrong. I am blessed to have an incredible family and a strong community to back me up. Israel was an inspiration - a living proof that, what some may perceive as impossible is possible, that we are more resourceful and resilient than we think. That something can be created from nothing if we want it badly enough and work together and most importantly to never give up.

To my family, my friends, my community, my people. Tonight is an opportunity for me to thank all of you. Your friendship, guidance, laughter and compassion means so much. Looking at this full room tonight makes me feel so loved and supported, I am not taking this for granted and I feel that no matter what comes my way, as I figure out this adult business, the fact that am surrounded by you, will set me up for success. Thank you for being here.

I want to thank Rabbi Dan, Rabbi Brown and Cantor Taussig for being so open and easy to talk with. For encouraging me to question and ponder and sort out how my beliefs fit within our religion. You made Bat Mitzvah lessons life lessons.

A very special thank to Cathe who started out as my Bat Mitzvah tutor and became part of our family in the process. To those of you who don't know Cathe was in Israel with us and led my Bat Mitzvah service – she was my teacher, guide and mentor and she even cried before my mom did – and if you know my mom, that says a lot.

My family is my rock, my safety & peace, my motivation and inspiration. I am so loved and I love them so much for so many reasons and in so many ways. I know how fortunate I am to have everything I have and the freedom to be who I am, unconditionally.

Thank you!