

First, I would like to thank everyone for coming to share this special day with me. I'd like to begin by telling you the story about the Israelites that is in the Torah portion that I just read, B'ha'alot'cha. In my portion, the Israelites are wandering through the desert with nothing to eat but the manna that they find. Manna was the special food that God provided for the Israelites to eat to keep themselves alive in the desert. You would think that they would be grateful for the chance to escape from slavery in Egypt. But what do they do in return? They begin to complain that they don't have good food to eat! They say, "At least in Egypt, we had good food. Now all we have to eat is this manna. We remember the food we ate in Egypt-- meat, cucumbers, melons, onions and garlic. Why can't we have meat now?"

This is no way to repay God for what he has done. He has led them out of Egypt, given them food to eat, and they're still alive, so what are they complaining about? They complain to Moses, and he is overwhelmed. In his frustration, he turns to God, saying, "How am I supposed to deal with all this complaining? I can't feed all these people meat! All we have is this manna. I can't do all this by myself. I need help. Is there anything you can do?"

God tells Moses to gather 70 Israelite elders, and tells him that they will help. Moses gathers the elders together and takes them to a tent. Then, God tells the Israelites, "You *will* eat meat! You will eat meat not for one day, not two days, not for five days, nor twenty, but for a month. You will eat meat for a month, day and night, until it's coming out of your nostrils!"

So Moses got what he wanted--help in leading the Israelites. And the Israelites got what they wanted. Well, sort of. I'm not quite sure that they wanted to eat so much meat that it would come out of their noses, but hey, who knows?

Two points in this story are relevant to my own life. The first one is the way the Israelites complained about their situation. The Israelites were punished because they were complaining too much, and God didn't like that. Well, nobody likes a complainer. I know from experience--it can be quite annoying. But, none the less, each and every one of us complains at least sometimes. And there are different types of complaining.

While the first type we may think of is the annoying kind of complaining, complaining can also serve a positive purpose. For example, it is important to complain about an injury or about an illness you might have, in order to get help, so this is a good kind of complaining--unless you repeat yourself so much that it gets really annoying. Also, it was Moses' complaining to God about being overwhelmed that let God know that he needed some help.

Bad complaining is basically complaining about something that you shouldn't be complaining about. For example, when the Israelites were complaining about the manna, they forgot about how bad their lives were when they were slaves in Egypt getting beaten under the hot sun, and not appreciating everything that God had done for them. In truth, if I had been there, I would probably have been one of the people complaining, but in reading about it, it seems like they were very ungrateful, and shouldn't have complained.

Okay, I admit it—I complain a lot. Looking at it from this perspective has made me see that sometimes, I too, forget about things I should be grateful for. There are times I complain about things that, in the overall scheme of things, aren't really that important. I guess the lesson here is that, when things seem difficult, instead

of complaining, it's a good idea to focus on ways to fix your difficulties and on the parts of your life in which you are fortunate.

The second part of the story that is relevant in my own life is when Moses asks for help, and the 70 elders help him by spreading out the burden of caring for the people among them. In my life, this reminds me of how I get help from my friends, teachers, coaches, and family. Over the past few years of my life, I've been lucky to have people to "lean on" when things were difficult. Whether it's been for skating, school, or needing to learn things for my Bat Mitzvah, I've always had someone to help me out.

When I can't land a jump or get frustrated with something, my coaches, Ralph and Rory, **are** there to help me. When they aren't there, I can even turn to my earlier coaches and friends, JJ and Sally. When I need help in math, my brother, Sam, helps me get it right. For this, my Bat Mitzvah, I had tons of help--Michael, Milly, and both Rabbi Wenger and Rabbi Harry helped me get prepared for this day. Through it all, I always have my friends and family to help me out and I am there for them as well. Like Moses, I know that I can't do it all alone, and am fortunate to have people I can count on to help me. And, like Moses, I am learning that I need to ask for help when I need it. I'd like to take this moment to thank a few of those people. Well, okay--a LOT of people.

First, I would like to thank Rabbi Harry for coming all the way from Buffalo to do my Bat Mitzvah. It means a lot to me, because you were the first Rabbi I ever knew and were part of my life for such a long time. I would also like to thank Rabbi Wenger and Michael Freiser for helping me prepare for this day. Without you guys I don't think I would have done this well. I would also like to say a

special thank you to Milly Josephson, who tutored and put up with me ever since last summer, to help me learn my Torah portion. Thank you, Milly!

Thank you, too, to my friends, teachers and coaches. You have all been great throughout this whole year, and very supportive when, yes--I complained! Without your support I don't know how I would have been able to do anything like this.

Thanks, guys. I would now like to thank my parents. I mean, what kind of a daughter wouldn't thank her parents? After all, I wouldn't be here if it weren't for you, right? You guys drove me here. So thanks, Mom and Dad, for everything--for driving me around, for putting up with me, and for everything else you do. I really couldn't have done this without you two.

And last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my brother, Sam. He's going off to college in the fall, and, as you can imagine, that's going to be really hard for me. We've always been very close. When all of our friends and their siblings were fighting, we used to think there was something wrong with them, because we never really fought. I'm going to miss you, Sam. Thanks for being such a great brother!

And now, to everyone else, thank you all, again, for coming to share this day with me--especially those of you who traveled from outside Alaska to be here today. It means a lot to me to have you here. As we say here at Beth Shalom, Shabbat Shalom.