

The Four Tallitot

Mom: Of course, nothing in our house is easy. So, it makes sense that giving you a tallit this all-important morning would be no different. We had an embarrassment of riches when it came to a tallit for you. But as we thought about it, the story of this tallit presentation is a pretty good metaphor for who you are and who we hope you will become. Ours is a story of 4 tallitot...

Dad: As you know, for a couple years now, we had intended to give you the tallit I received when I became a Bar Mitzvah. It is a beautiful tallit that Aunt brought back with her from Israel. Grammy and Grandpa handed it to me on the day I became a Bar Mitzvah, just as we stand here with you. My Bar Mitzvah tallit has always represented to me a connection to Judaism and to my family. Giving it to you would represent a handing down of our heritage, "l'dor v'dor." -- from generation to generation, father to son. With it comes a connection to Judaism that you will take up and make your own.

Mom: There is also the tallit that you made with your Hebrew class a few months ago. This tallit is important because it is the product of your own hands. Let me just say that your Hebrew class is a really special group of young people, and we are so happy that you've been a part of it. It is a community of yours that has been nurtured by friendship and learning for many years. In some cases, you have been with these friends since you started at Temple's Preschool. How wonderful to have a tallit that represents the beginnings of your *own* Jewish community as you become a Jewish adult today.

The next tallit is one you've chosen for yourself. It is a tallit you will grow into, both literally and figuratively. Making room for your growth as a Jewish adult is particularly meaningful to us. As you know, your becoming a Bar Mitzvah does not end your Jewish education. It really *begins* it. Judaism requires life-long study and commitment. We hope that you will always be learning, questioning and engaging Jewishly. This tallit represents the beginning of your growth and maturity as a Jewish man.

Dad: We added the fourth tallit when Zayde passed away last summer. We decided to save Zayde's Bar Mitzvah tallit for you today. It is old, and stained, and maybe a little threadbare, but we know he would have been honored to see you wear it today. In this way, he continues to be with you. Wrapped in his tallit you will always be wrapped in, and embraced by, his love.

When Mom and I were married, we sewed together Grandpa's and Zayde's tallitot to serve as our chuppah. It symbolized the joining together of our lives, our homes and our families. A tallit can represent much more than the 613 mitzvot: it can represent your ancestry, your heritage, your community, your family – your past, your present and your future.

Mom: There's a lot that will rest on your shoulders as you wrap yourself in a tallit and bless the Torah today. You will assume the responsibilities of a Jewish adult – and all that those responsibilities entail. Just know that your 4 tallitot will connect you to the Jews who have come before you, and who will be with you as you forge your own path. Wear them *all* with pride and love.

Both: Mazel Tov, Son. We love you.

Speech #2

MOM: Counting is very important on Shabbat B'Midbar. We are in the middle of the Counting of the Omer, the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot. The Jewish community is **literally** counting the days until we celebrate the giving of the Torah. This Shabbat we also begin B'Midbar, the 4th Book of the Torah. In English, this book is called "Numbers." It begins and ends with the counting of the Israelites. And specifically, in your parasha, one year, one month and one day after the Exodus from Egypt, God commands Moses and Aaron to **count**.

DAD: Moses did not ask the heads of each family or tribe to count their men. Rather *each person* was invited to pass before Moses. Clearly, this was not the most efficient way of counting 603,550 people. But, according to rabbinic commentary, the way in which the census is taken, **head by head**, person by person, was very important. It showed that each individual counted, and was important to the success of the whole community.

MOM: Thousands of years later, what does all this counting have to do with you, as we join you on the bimah to give you this tallit? Well, this is the tallit *you designed and we made*, with tzitzit we knotted, wrapped and **counted** together... And today, as you wrap yourself in this tallit, bless the Torah, and read from it—you will become one of the minyan. Part of the community, and integral to its success. Today **you** will be counted!

DAD: So, are you done? No more Jewish education? No more Jewish involvement? Child, you already know the answer. NO! Rather, you are just beginning a new journey, as a Jewish adult. On your way we hope Judaism provides you with tremendous joy and comfort, but it will also demand of you commitment.

MOM: Thirteen years ago at your baby naming when you were introduced to your first Jewish ceremony, we recited a special prayer for you. Take a look at the congregation today. Many of these people were there celebrating with us. But we didn't expect that they (or you) would remember this prayer, so it seems appropriate to read it to you again. It sums up pretty well what Dad and I are thinking today:

I wish for you to be a person of character,
Strong but not tough, gentle but not weak.
I wish for you to be righteous but not self-righteous,
Honest but not unforgiving.
Wherever you journey, may your steps be firm
And may you walk in just paths and not be afraid.
Whenever you speak, may your words
Be words of wisdom and friendship.
May your hands build and your heart preserve
What is good and beautiful in the world.
May the voices of the generations of our people
Move through you
And may the God of our ancestors be your God as well.
May you know that there is a people, a rich heritage,
To which you belong
And from that sacred place, you are connected
To all who dwell on the Earth.
May the stories of our people be upon your heart

And the ***grace of the Torah rhythm*** dance in your soul.

MOM: Child, the grace of the Torah rhythm *does* dance in your soul. You are part of a wonderful community, and a link to a special heritage.

DAD: When we stood in our back yard and named you 13 years ago, we did not know the struggles you would have to overcome, and what a miracle it would be to have you standing here today as a Bat Mitzvah. That just makes this moment all the sweeter. Today you begin a journey toward Jewish adulthood. We hope that the example we have set in our home and with our family, friends and community will help you on this journey. And, when in doubt, we will always be there for you.

MOM: So go out and be a force for good in the world. Imagine all the blessings the future holds; blessings that your intellect, laughter, loyalty, creativity, and kindness can bring to us all in the days and years to come. L'hitatef batzitzit –envelope yourself in your tallit and wrap yourself in the mitzvot. Stand up and be counted, Child. That is the legacy of Shabbat B'Midbar.

BOTH: We love you.

Speech #3

Mom: Child, here you are. Ready to recite the blessing over the tallit, wrap your self in the mitzvot, and begin your journey into Jewish adulthood.

Blessings are tricky. They can be ordinary, even mundane. When we recite them by rote, they seem bereft of any meaning, or “cheesy” (your word). But, they can also have an extraordinary power. With apologies to Ms.____, they can be a *metaphor* for our hopes and aspirations.

There is one blessing in particular that is very special to Dad and me. It is a blessing we only began saying when we became parents. To us, it represents the magic you, Sally and Todd have brought to our lives, and all the potential your futures hold. We recite it every Friday night as we gather around the Shabbat dinner table. We place our hands on your head and bless you by saying, “May you be like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah...”

Dad: Now, these women lived thousands of years ago. In a different age, in a different time, in a different world, really. How could you, a 21st century, YouTube-watching, Twilight-reading teenager, begging for Facebook and a cell phone, ever be like one of these ancient, tent-dwelling, desert nomad matriarchs? Why would you even *want* to be like them??

Why, for instance, would Mom and I want you to be like *Sarah*? We are told that Sarah was beautiful, so beautiful that kings were known to detain her, trying to keep her for their own harems. And Sarah was a pioneer who, late in her life, left her home to travel with her husband to Canaan. She had a sense of humor, laughing out loud when she was told that (at the age of 90) she would have a child! So, yes! We want you to be beautiful and adventurous, and to laugh easily.

Mom: Why would Dad and I want you to be like *Rebecca*? She was kind and generous. She offered water to thirsty strangers, acting as a human oasis in the desert. Her welcoming nature won Isaac’s heart. So yes! We want you to be kind, generous, warm and welcoming.

Rachel and Leah were sisters, wives to Jacob. Why would Dad and I want you to be like them? After all, they represent the Torah’s most extreme case of female sibling rivalry. Where Rachel was fair, Leah was plain; where Rachel was loved, Leah was overlooked. But a deception caused Jacob to marry Leah, instead of Rachel. So, they had... “baggage.” But they put aside their pain and jealousy to live together. They were fruitful, bearing many children to Jacob. Ultimately, they raised the twelve tribes of Israel! And it was Rachel, Jacob’s true love, who bore Joseph, the man about whom you will read in your Torah portion this morning.

Dad: So, Child, on this very special day **and every day**, here is what we wish for you, our modern, independent, fashionista, elder daughter:

Like Sarah may you continue to be beautiful, inside and out.
May you always have your adventurous spirit, your wonderful intellect and your razor-sharp wit.
And, may you laugh easily and often.
Like Rebecca may you be kind and generous to all whom you encounter.
May you be warm and welcoming in your spirit, and in your home.
And, may you always put people at ease.
Like Leah and Rachel, may you be strong enough to overcome pain and jealousy.

May you think of others and, by doing so, teach yourself compassion and empathy.
May you know the joy of family.
May you be fruitful in all your endeavors.
And may you find companionship and true love along your journey.

Mom: As you place this tallit that we made together around your shoulders and bless it; as you wrap yourself in the mitzvot, and as you begin your journey into Jewish adulthood, these are our prayers for *you*, Child.

Both: Mazel Tov. We love you.