

BAR MITSVA DRASHA – Ethan Moses Corke

איתן בן שושנה

Delivered on Shabbat Parshat Nitsavim/Vayyelech

31st August 2013 – 25th Elul 5773

By Rabbi Chaim Ingram

In Strathfield Synagogue

(Valedictory Service – Strathfield Synagogue?)

I suppose I can say a *Shehecheyanu* on two counts this morning: my first Bar Mitsva in Strathfield and my first-ever visit to this magnificent shul. *Barukh Shehecheyanu ve-kiyemanu ve-higianu la-zman ha-zeh!*

Mazal Tov to Ethan and to the entire Moses and Corke families and the extended Moses family.

It's very moving to me to be officiating at the Bar Mitsva of the grandson of an ex-President and longstanding board member of the synagogue, Mr. Jacob Moses (more on that later), the great-grandson of an esteemed (founder-)member, the late Mr. Moses Perez Moses z"l and, moreover, a young man that I have had the privilege of tutoring and guiding for the past several months. The fruits of his diligence you all heard today!

A question.

What is the most challenging word in the Torah?

Were I to go around the 150-or-so people gathered here today, every one of you would probably have a different proposal.

My nomination is the word HAYOM – “today!”

We read it twice daily in the Shema. “Take to heart the words which I, G-D, am commanding you **today!**” Not yesterday's news, not a historical snapshot rooted in the dim and distant past. The Torah can be as dynamic and relevant in the here and now as though the words were being spoken from Mount Sinai **today!**

At the end of the emotion-laden Musaph service of Rosh HaShana which we shall be celebrating in five days' time, we will all sing with full voice HAYOM TE'AMTSEINU! Today may You strengthen us! HAYOM TEVARECHEINU! Today may You bless us! HAYOM TEGADELEINU! Today may you exalt us! Not tomorrow – it isn't a pie-in-the-sky utopian dream for which we pray. We go into each Rosh HaShana hoping this year will be better than the last. Not only better but much better! TODAY it'll all come right!

Those of us who were in shul last week will have heard the lachrymose litany of ninety-eight dire warnings of what will happen if we go astray from the path which G-D has mapped out for us – but then, all of a sudden at the start of today's reading, Moses proclaims to his people: “Today you are standing before the L-RD your G-D!” Never mind yesterday! TICHLEH SHANA VE-KILELOTEIHA. The old year, the past, with its disappointments has ended. Put it behind you; let it go! TACHEL SHANA UVIRCHOTEIHA. The new year with its blessings is here!

Yes, the curses of the past have taken their inestimable toll. If it wasn't for pogrom, persecution, anti-Semitism, the Jewish people would possibly be a billion strong today!

(Some of our enemies imagine we **are** a billion strong!) Still and all, we have survived - we're standing here today before G-D!

My dear Ethan, this is the message I want to give over to you today – the greatest day in your lifeso far! That is the message of “today”. Always celebrate the new “today”!

That is in no way to minimise the past. We are what we are today because of all our yesterdays. Your mother Rosanne's family, the Moses family, came to Australia from India in 1972 and so here you are, Ethan, a dinky-di Aussie and a Sydneysider to boot, celebrating your Bar Mitsva here in Strathfield Shul on this historic day – but we cannot live in the past. I'm not sure when there was last a *minyán* present in this Shul. I know that already back in April 2011 your President, Eddy Neumann, was saying it was impossible getting a *minyán* for both days of Rosh HaShana!

So the history of Strathfield War Memorial Synagogue may have ended then and there – but you, Ethan, and your family said NO! You and they were determined that you would celebrate your Bar Mitsva in the shul where you live, where your uncle celebrated **his** Bar Mitsva and where your mum celebrated **her** Bar Mitsva. And you have done it – today. The history of Strathfield Synagogue continues.

Who is to say that it will not continue? Who says that there are not ten, twenty, maybe thirty families somewhere in the vicinity? You, Ethan, have given this community new hope!

I know, Ethan, that you are a Liverpool F.C. supporter – as is your dad and his family – and I've forgiven you for that!!! Even though I think a good Jewish boy should support Tottenham Hotspur, I have to admit that Liverpool have a proud history. Championships galore, F.A. Cups – and some years ago they won the biggest prize of all, the Champions' League, in stunning style.

But I can hear you, Ethan, saying back to me “who cares about the past! I want them to do well **this** season! I want them to win **today**!”

Ethan, **today** you begin your life as an adult Jew. A Jew committed to the duties and the values of the Torah from which you just read. The Torah donated to this synagogue by your Papa (Jacob) and Nana.

In the last part of today's reading, just before you read, G-D appears to Moses and tells him what will happen in the future if the people forget about G-D and *mitsvot*. If that should happen, says G-D, “I shall hide My Face” *I won't do miracles and wonders like in the old days at the splitting of the Sea and with the Manna in the desert. Because they hide from Me, I shall hide from them!*

“G-D is your shadow” says King David. The way we act to Him, He'll act back to us. And so He distances Himself from us and we find it hard to discover G-D even when we try. So what's the solution? How do we break the cycle?

The Torah tells us in the very next verse. “Now go write for yourselves this song!” What is the song? None other (say our Rabbis) than the Torah itself which is compared to a song

The 613th and final *mitsva* (commandment) of the Torah is to write a Sefer Torah - or at least complete it – and place it in the choicest location of the synagogue, in the *aron kodesh* (holy Ark). That is what your Papa did – and today, Ethan, in reading from that very same Torah, you have forged a link between the generations that your children, please G-D, will continue a generation on.

But that will only happen if you make the Torah into a song. Not just by chanting the Torah as you did so beautifully for us this morning. But by viewing the Torah as a song, as something alive, something forever new.

A classic song you can hear a hundred times and always experience something new in it. Allow the Torah to do that to you! It is the most magnificent, most inexhaustible, most profound song ever composed – but it is also accessible, as we read this morning, “in your mouth and in your heart, to do it!” Its notes must be on your lips but not just to pay lip service. Its cadences must also resonate in your heart and in everything you do.

Ethan, your mum does a two-hour journey every day in order that you can attend a school where you have Jewish friends and where you can know something of what it means to be Jewish. I hope you will want to grow in your knowledge, learn more, explore more of your Jewish heritage – and I’m here to help you do that if you need me!

Today is the first day of the rest of your life! What an exciting concept! Ethan, make it count.

I hope you will do so as part of this Community – and I want to say here and now to you all, all of you who love this Shul, that I am a freelance Rabbi and I’m available to help. But if it is not to be this community, then in whichever Jewish community you choose, stand up to be counted.

Forge a relationship with your fellow-Jew and with HaShem – and I can assure you, Ethan, that if you do, **you’ll never walk alone!**

I know that you’re a tennis-lover too, so you’ll appreciate this final thought. Judaism is like tennis. In tennis we receive but we also have to serve.. In Judaism too, we serve G-D and the needs of others and the sure consequence is that we shall receive His wonderful blessings!

MAZAL TOV!

Rabbi Chaim Ingram