

Welcome to the Israeli part of my Bat Mitzva, family & friends.  
I'm so glad that you are all here! Thank you for coming and thank you mum and dad, and Rona and Eran for organising this lovely picnic!

On Shabbat 5 Tevet, 31 December 2011, the day after my Hebrew birthday, I made a Dvar Torah in shul in Liverpool about my parasha, Vayigash, and later at the dinner in the shul hall on Motzei Shabbat I spoke about my Bat Mitzva project, from which I drew my Dvar Torah. I am going to tell you about this project now.

When I decided to do a project about Aliyah and Israel, and its place in my life as a Jew and as an individual, and connecting these topics to my parasha, it was before we made the decision to make Aliyah ourselves. Maybe Hashem knew that when he gave me the idea for the project – and I thought it was all my idea!  
If you wish to have a look at it, it's over there! And you can have an electronic copy if you email us!

I would like to thank my Mum, Dad, Brother Yonatan, Saba Moshe, Savta Bella, Grandma Valerie, great Saba Moshe, great aunt Muza and cousins Julie and others who helped me create this "*work of art.*"

For my project I found out about people in my family who have planned or made Aliyah, and this has helped me understand what Israel means to me & every other Jew in the world.

Israel means a lot to me, first as a Jew, because it is my homeland and it is where the Temple stood and where it will stand again when Moshiach will come; and secondly as an Israeli, because all of my mum's side and much of my dad's side of the family is there & it is my nationality.

Israel is central in every Jew's life whether they realise it or not. It is the only Jewish state in the whole world & many people have given up their lives so we can live there in safety & we are very thankful for that. In my project I tell the story of individual members of my family, some are still with us and some are not and we truly miss them. I also wrote about Zionism and our strong connection to Israel. One of the stories, about my great great grandfather Menachem Mendel, a Talmid Chacham, ties all this together especially well because he made a very dangerous journey from Lithuania to Jerusalem in

1911 as a very old man of 71, in order that he might die in the land of our ancestors, and he is buried on the Mount of Olives.

I also wrote about my name. My middle name, Rachel, was given to me in honour of my great grandma, my dad's, dad's mother. I was told by my grandma Valerie that if my dad had been a girl he would have had this honour, but instead he is named for Rachel's husband, Michael. Unfortunately Rachel died very soon after giving birth to her daughter, Mary Toby, when her son, my grandpa Mendel, was only 2 years old. In 2006 we visited South Africa, and I met for the first time my cousin Helene and her husband, Jack. She was the daughter of Ben, who was the brother of Rachel's husband, Michael. While we were there, we found and visited Rachel's grave. Because it is in a remote cemetery, and her family moved away, and travel was difficult in the old days, and the family later mostly emigrated or passed on, it is likely that her grave had not been visited for decades since she died in 1928, if ever. The visit was even more emotional because, when we finally found the cemetery (which was not easy!) Rachel's gravestone was one of only 5 or 6 that remained in one corner – the rest had gone. Even more miraculously, Rachel's was the only original gravestone – the few others had been replaced with new ones – and although it was broken in a few pieces, some unknown kind and thoughtful person (all we know is that no-one in the family had done it) had cemented all the jigsaw pieces together for her. There is a picture in my project book.

I also share my name with our Matriarch, Rachel, who was Ya'akov's true love. I write in my project about the modesty and self sacrifice Rachel showed for her sister, Leah, which is an inspiration for me. I was very moved to visit Kever Rachel (Rachel's tomb) with Saba Moshe, my brother and parents on Wednesday this week.

I hope you enjoy the rest of my Bat Mitzva picnic.