

Ben G.'s Sermon—The Power of Words

First, I would like to thank everyone for coming to my Bar Mitzvah. I am really glad that my grandparents are able to be here today, my Baba Judy, Papa Norm, and Grandma Ilene. I wish that my other grandpa, Seymour, had lived to see my Bar Mitzvah. I am wearing a tie that was special to him so that I can keep him near to my heart.

I also want to thank Rabbi Arnie and Mrs. Hirsch for helping me reach this milestone in my life.

And, I want to thank Dr. Rick Solomon, my teachers and therapists who came today: *each* of you have helped me along the way.

As you just heard, my Torah Portion was B'reisheit. It's cool to get to stand up here and say "B'reisheit", which is the Hebrew word for: "In the beginning..." It made me feel powerful.

As I was studying for today, my Mom and Dad told me that *my* torah portion was about how God made the universe.

For those of you who have been to our house and seen my bedroom, you know that I am *very* interested in planets, space and weather. My bedroom has lots of posters, books, and models about weather and outer space. I've seen movies about the "Big Bang" Theory of how the planets were created. So, the story of God creating the universe was very interesting to me. I wanted to understand it better.

One day, my Mom and I sat down to read my Torah portion in English. I was looking forward to hearing how God created the universe—what *ingredients* did He use? When we finished reading, Mom said "See, this tells you how God created the universe!"

I didn't mean to be disrespectful, but I told my Mom she was wrong. I didn't learn how God created the universe by reading

this. (I was hoping there would be a recipe that I could use to “create” earth. But, there wasn’t.)

So, Mom and I re-read it, and I showed her that this Torah portion doesn’t tell us what ingredients God used to create the universe. Instead, it tells us that God made the universe by saying words.

In verse 3, God said “*let there be light and there was light.*” In verse 9, God said “*let the waters beneath the heaven be gathered into one area and let the dry land appear. And it was so.*”

From this Torah portion, we learn that God didn’t make the universe using a “magic wand” or a “special recipe”. Instead, God created the universe by His speech.

Clearly, my Torah portion teaches us that God’s words are so powerful that they *created* our universe. But, I don’t think this Torah portion is only about the power of

God's words. I think it's also about the power of *our* words. (After all, who else was God talking to if not us?)

This subject—the *power* of words—is something that I know about from my own life. As most of you know, I didn't speak until I was about 3 years old. Since I couldn't speak, I couldn't tell people what I was feeling or thinking. I experienced the fact that you have NO power if you have NO words. You cannot tell your Mom and Dad what you want or need. You cannot tell your brother it's scary when he sings too loud. All you can do is cry and be frustrated and, without words, you cannot change anything to make it better.

With the help of a wonderful doctor, great teachers, speech therapists, and my family, I learned to speak. *That* shows the power of words. I am here today because of the power of *encouraging, loving* words that

many of you used to help me speak--and grow.

There's also a "bad" side to the power of words. Sometimes, I hear stories about parents who say bad things to their kids—like: "You're worthless!" or "You'll never amount to anything!" Those words are *very* powerful—especially when a parent or teacher says them to a kid. And they're very hurtful.

But, it's the speaking of the words that generates the power. It's not enough to just *think* them! Today's Torah portion *could have said* "And God *thought* there should be light...and it was so." But, that's not how it's written. Instead, it's written that God *said* the words, and the universe got created.

So, is this important—the difference between spoken words and ideas? I think it is. For example, if I were to see my friend getting bullied, it's *not* enough for me to just stand by and watch, *thinking* how awful my

friend must be feeling. The “power of words” means that I am supposed to do more than just have the idea or *think* of what to say: I should *actually say something* (either to stop the bully or get an adult to break them up.) *Spoken* words are the first step in taking action.

The “power of words” is a catchy phrase, but it’s a lot more than that. If you think about the power of spoken words in your life (like I have for the past few months) you’ll see examples of it all around you. Hopefully, as I get older, I can use the power of my words to connect with God, to help people, and to speak up for good causes. Maybe we all can....