

Yizkor Sermon
Shavuot 2010
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Shavuot, *zeman matan torahtenu*, the time of the giving of the Torah, is a time of heightened awareness to the incredible gift of Torah. If we are attuned to the Jewish calendar, it is almost impossible to ignore Judaism's relentless insistence that we continually learn Torah and that we allow its wisdom to permeate our lives.

One of the ways that Torah seeps into our beings is through participation in a *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*, a night-long study session on the eve of the holiday. Many in our community participated in this event on Tuesday night. The Hebrew word, "*Tikkun*," literally means repair, but it can also mean a period of study that helps to repair the world, and in turn helps to repair us, to improve us as human beings as we delve into Torah. A *Tikkun* transforms the idea of receiving Torah into an active *mitzvah*. A *tikkun* makes Torah come alive in a concrete and communal way as we "do" now what the holiday has symbolized to Jews throughout the generations.

As we move through Shavuot, we shift our focus from *Tikkun* to *Yizkor*, from studying to remembering. This gives us an opportunity to weave the theme of Shavuot, the receiving of the Torah, into our obligation to remember the powerful lessons of those loved ones who came before us. We can meld our desire to learn, to grow and to evolve as human beings with reflection on these life lessons. *Yizkor* can act as its own kind of *tikkun*, as we reflect on those people close to us who once walked this Earth. Many of these were beloved teachers of life, regardless of whether they were parents, grandparents or a spouse. Even a younger

sibling or a child was able to teach us. We often recognized this during their lifetime – we knew they had inspiring wisdom to impart to us and that we had much to glean from them. On the other hand, many of us realize these gifts after people have passed from this world into the next. It is then that we understand what great life lessons or unique Torah they were trying to teach us. We can even learn lessons from those we struggled with during their lifetime.

With our loved ones' departure from this world, we find ourselves left behind in the foyer of life. In *Pirkei Avot*, our ancient ethical teachings, Rabbi Ya'akov compares *Olam Ha Zeh*, the physical world in which we live, to a foyer. The foyer is where our loved ones walked with us, where we learned Torah from them and where we can continue to actualize what we learned from them.

I ask that you join me in taking a moment to focus on one or two important or meaningful values or lessons learned from a person who is no longer with us in the foyer. This could be something they taught you when they were alive or it could be something you learned from them after they left the foyer. It could be sparked by a memory, a word, a picture in your mind. It could be something that you want to internalize in your own life or something that you need to act on now.

PAUSE. . .

These life lessons that our ancestors and our loved ones have taught can become our own form of Torah. And the ideals of Shavuot encourage us to take this idea of life as a foyer even further. While Rabbi Ya'kov tells us that the foyer is a place for us to prepare ourselves, he also tells us at the end of the *mishnah*, that the foyer will lead to God's banquet hall that we will enter in the world to come. In this banquet hall, we will be re-united with

those who have passed before us, but until then it is up to us to make the most of our time in the foyer here in *Olam Ha Zeh*.

How do we make the most of this time? In the words of the *mishnah*, how do we “prepare ourselves?” The Kotzer Rebbe, tells us that we should not study Torah, but we should “be” Torah. If we take the Kotzer Rebbe words to heart and bring them together with Rabbi Ya’akov’s wisdom, we see that our time in the foyer is not only for studying or thinking about our loved ones, but rather this time is for becoming the best of what our loved ones taught us. Not just reflecting on them and thinking about them, but living out their values. This is what the Kotzer Rebbe meant by becoming Torah. If our loved ones were masters of *tzedakah*, then we should be masters of *tzedakah*. If they exercised infinite patience in their relationships with others, then we should do so. If they gracefully dealt with their own infirmities, managed illness in such a way that they didn’t lose sight of others, we should strive to this ideal. If they lived a life of dedication to *mitzvot*, cleaved to Shabbat and the Jewish people, then we owe it to them and to ourselves to live out those values.

Today as we open the Yizkor booklet and direct our prayers to God, we have the holy opportunity to be Torah in the name of our loved ones. May this Yizkor service allow us to leave this Sanctuary today with the resolve to make our loved ones’ Torah be embodied in our actions. Not only in our minds and in our hearts, but in our limbs as we move through the foyer of life knowing that we will all ultimately enter the banquet hall of *Olam Ha Ba*.