

YCT Dinner, March 2008

Presentation to Rabbi Marc Gitler, East Denver Orthodox Synagogue

Alumnus of the Year

In only a few days, on Purim, we will be reading Megilat Esther. At the climax of the story, the Jewish people experience a reversal of fortune: Esther's request is granted, Haman is cast down, and the people see the light of hope from amidst the darkness of despair. Their exultation and joy bursts forth: **ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר** – “And the Jews had light and happiness, joy and honor.”

The Talmud explains that this “light” is not just the light of hope, but the light of Torah (Megillah 16b). Having lived in the darkness of exile, the people had lost their connection to God and the Torah and it is only when they experience a miraculous salvation, that they are able to see the light, and to reconnect to God and to God's Torah.

For much of our people, even today, the light that is the Torah remains dim. Many Jews lack a robust Jewish identity, a connection to God, and a life of Jewish meaning. Even Jews who are meticulous in their performance of halakha often have only a weak sense of the **אורה, שמחה וששון ויקר**, of the light, the happiness, the joy and the honor that should come from a meaningful and committed Jewish life.

Our challenge is to promote a Judaism that speaks to all people and that gives meaning and depth to their lives; a Judaism that connects them to the light and joy of Torah. We must do so not, as in the past, by focusing people on the oppressive darkness that surrounds them, but rather by allowing them to experience the power of the light itself.

The *musmach* whom we honor tonight, Rabbi Marc Gitler, spiritual leader of the East Denver Orthodox Synagogue, is a rabbi who has, in just a few years, already begun to bring the light and honor of the Torah to the Jewish People. Rabbi Gitler is a Torah scholar and a courageous leader. He is a rabbi who connects with people of all ages and who cares deeply for all Jews, inspiring his congregants at EDOS and building Jewish

communities in Belarus in the FSU. Rabbi Gitler exemplifies through his teaching and actions how Torah can and must be a religious and moral force in the world, and can speak to the most pressing of today's challenges.

Rabbi Gitler, we ask you to come up to accept the alumnus of the year award.

Rabbi Gitler, Marc, already in your first few years in the rabbinate, you have proven yourself to be a rabbi who, by teaching and example, gives people pride in their Jewish heritage and identity, enabling them to embrace both the 'happiness' and the 'honor' that is the Torah. Rabbi Gitler, YCT *musmach* of 2005, you truly embody the values and mission of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, and we are honored tonight to present you with the Alumnus of the Year award, and with this gift.

Mazel Tov.