

Rabbi Dov Linzer
Gala Dinner Speech, March 2010

Stephen, Yehuda, Davidi, Andy, Daniel, Chai, Zach, Akiva, and Shmuly, my dear students:

זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל, “This is *haTorah*, the law: If a person dies in a tent...” (Bamidbar 19:14).

Just yesterday we read this verse from the special reading of Parashat Parah. It is a verse that refers to how one becomes impure from contact with the dead and may not enter the Temple, may not draw close to God. Our Rabbis have read this verse metaphorically, in the opposite direction, to refer to exactly how one can draw close to God: “זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל” - This is the Torah, if a person dies in a tent – the Torah is only acquired by one who ‘dies over it,’” (Berachot 63a). Torah greatness can only be achieved if one devotes all one’s energies to the study of the Torah, if one is prepared to sacrifice oneself in the tent of the Torah.

My dear students, you know this message well. You have devoted many years in the tents of Torah, in our yeshiva, and in your studies prior to entering our yeshiva. You have made many sacrifices, your families have made many sacrifices, so that you could grow in Torah, so that you could acquire Torah, so that you could become who you are today - תלמידי חכמים - true Torah scholars.

However, you are much more than תלמידי חכמים. You are also future rabbis. As future leaders you cannot remain in the tent of Torah, you cannot devote your entire life to your own religious and intellectual growth. As leaders responsible for the transmission of Torah and Torah values, as leaders responsible for the Jewish people, you must leave the tent of Torah and enter into the larger world. As leaders who represent Torah, you must embody the truth that the Torah is meant to be lived and applied in the full messiness of the world.

זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל - “This is the Torah -if a person dies in a tent”. What is the Torah? It is to connect with those who are dying. It is to enter into the tent of those who are ill and suffering, it is to bring consolation and spiritual guidance to those who have just suffered a loss.

This is the Torah - entering the entire world, in all its tragedies and in all its joys.

This is the Torah – it is death and birth, it is weddings, it is funerals, and it is baby namings.

This is the Torah – it is 'ממעמקים קראתיך ה' "from the depths I have called you," and it is 'הודו לה' כי טוב, "Praise the Lord for the Lord is good."

When one leaves the tent of Torah, things can get a little messy. One could even become impure. As we learn in Parashat Parah, the person who sprinkled the ashes of the red heifer to purify others, impure, became impure in the process. To devote oneself to the growth of others, is to make certain sacrifices. But this is what Torah leadership is about. This is our mandate. This is our calling.

My dear students:

As your own dedication these last four years have shown, you know that your own religious and intellectual growth is a high ideal. But as growing תלמידי חכמים who have chosen Yeshivat Chovevei Torah as your rabbinical school, as future leaders of the Jewish community, you realize that this - your own personal ritual purity - is not the highest ideal. As you now stand on the threshold of entering into the rabbinate and serving the Jewish people, you affirm that true service to God comes through service to the community, through a dedication to personal religious growth wedded to the service of the Jewish People.

Stephen, Yehuda, Davidi, Andy, Daniel, Chai, Zach, Akiva, and Shmuly:

You will bring this true Torah leadership into your Jewish communities and into the larger world. We know that you will do us proud, that you will embody of וזאת התורה, modeling religious growth and religious responsibility. We are proud to call you our students, you - the next generation of Torah leadership for the Jewish People.

Mazel Tov!