Shavuoth 5760
"Receiving Torah"

I stood about twenty feet from the Rabbi, a great man, both in scholarship and stature. He was dressed in a flowing blue robe, with a grey beard and long tallis. The way the light shone through the stain glass window over his shoulder, it appeared as if God had anointed him for this task and this moment particularly. Twenty feet, up the small stairs to where he stood on the bima then up two more steps to the open ark. That was the journey that I would soon walk to become a Rabbi, it had taken six years to get to my holding spot, in what my classmates called the On Deck Circle to the right of the Bima, and now 6 years and 20 feet later I was about to be ordained a Rabbi.

I struggle to describe what I was thinking at that moment, it sounds cliché, but I was thinking nothing and everything all at once. It is a numbing experience, a three hour Shabbat morning service, full of speakers and special readings in celebration of this moment, and then one by one my classmates walked those 20 feet, they went up to the bima a student and descended a Rabbi.

I am not sure what I was thinking then, but now, after the food, the celebration, the gifts, and my proud parents now calling me Rabbi instead of Danny, I am thinking, if it were only that simple, if we could just be transformed from one thing to another in a moment, an instant; if all it took to make me a Rabbi was a blessing and a handshake. But the process was not that quick, it did not happen in an instant and it is not done yet.

In our world today we tend to forget that change does not happen over night, or over a crossing of the bima. We tend to think that a one can be transformed from a single person, with all of his or her self-centeredness to a spouse through a wedding ceremony.

That a woman or man can be magically transformed into a mother or father at the birth of our child. Our tradition would even teach that a 13 year old becomes an adult at the moment they are first called to the Torah.

We are expected to be those things at the moment it is ordained that we become them, but in reality we all know that it is simply not the case. No proclamation, event or blessing transforms our spirit, or our soul, it is only our title, and the community's expectations of us that change in an instant, we take a life time to grow in to the roles we play in life.

As an adult, I am just now figuring out how I could have made the most of my childhood. Now that I finished school, I am finally ready, though I admit not willing to be a serious student.

I come down that other side of the bima after the Rabbi places his hands on my head in what can only be described as a Star Trek Vulcan mind-meld the likes of which Dr. Spock never imagined. In my mind I am no more or less a Rabbi than I was before I walked those twenty feet. But something has changed; the world's, society's expectations of me have been permanently altered. Like those of a new father, new wife, 16 year old first time driver, I am expected at that very moment, to maintain a certain standard of behaviour and proficiency in my new life that I have yet to actually experience for even one day, let alone a week, a month or a year. And while we all know that everything has a learning curve, how much time for learning do we really give to a new mother, first time spouse, driver, or in my case Rabbi? Not as much as we probably should.

Tonight we celebrate the holiday of Shavuoth, it was at this time, on this date thousands of years ago that the Jewish people were given the Torah. They stood at the base of Mt Sinai a persecuted and simple people. They had lived a life of toil, they had assimilated into Egyptian society, they had worshipped idols and they had forsaken their traditions. In a moment Moses came down from the mountain and gave them the Torah. In an instant they accepted it and they and all future generations were forever bound to its teachings and precepts. They had not even read it yet, but they were expected to follow in its ways, to walk in its paths.

How could this be so? Was there0 not a recognition that they needed to study and learn what was inside before they could be expected to be what they had suddenly become? The answer is yes and no. They were