MEASURE TWICE AND CUT ONCE
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz
Mitzvah Day Sermon 2005
November 4, 2005

As some of you know, Sharon and I recently bought our first house, it's a modest 1950's home in a great neighborhood not far from the temple and one we look forward to raising our family in. As anyone who is a home owner knows, and as I quickly learned there is always something to fix in a house. In choosing a neighborhood I should have calculated not the distance to the synagogue that I would have to travel but to the nearest Home Depot, because I am there nearly as often as I am here.

In spite of the repair that it always needed, I love owning a home, and we haven't even moved in yet. I had a professor in college once who observed that there are two types of people in the world those that like to pull things apart and those who like to put things together. I am definitely of the later category, I like to fix things; I like to put things together, I am sure many of you are the same way.

I think this aspect of my personality is why before I became a rabbi, I used to be a cabinet maker, I know what you are thinking, carpenter then a rabbi, who does this remind me of???? But truth be told the two functions have a lot in common.

Both are concerned with building things and fixing things. As a cabinetmaker I built furniture for function as well as aesthetics and as a rabbi I endeavor with my colleagues to build a sacred community that functions well and is appealing to an outsider.

As a cabinet maker, much of my time was spent sanding down the rough nature of the wood. In fact for my first year as an apprentice that was all I did for 4 hours a day, was sand furniture. As a rabbi, my job is often to help smooth out the rough spots in life, to help take away some of the hard edges and fill in the nicks and scrapes that life deals us from time to time

Likewise, just as Judaism has commandments so does woodworking. The commandments of woodworking are fewer than those of the Torah, but as anyone who has ever tried to build something knows, they speak with a similar authority and prescience. The three commandments of woodworking are:

1. Measure twice and cut once
2. The right tool for the right job
3. If it doesn't fit hit it with a hammer, if it still doesn't fit its scrap wood.

This past week and on through this weekend our congregation and the entire Jewish community has been preparing for the important work of Mitzvah Day, a day built upon the kabalistic principle of Tikkun Olam, the repairing or the mending of the world. It goes without saying that every day is Mitzvah Day, that as Jews we are commanded to repair the brokenness in our world whenever we encounter it. That our sacred

responsibility as partners with God in the on going work of creation is to seek out the rough spots in our world, to find the broken souls and systems in our community and to repair them, to sand and build, to heal and mend. Sunday we will do that on a massive scale, hundreds from our congregation will join thousands from the community, and together we will continue the ongoing work of Tikkun, of repair. As we go out into the world as God's cabinetmakers, I think we would do well to be guided by the commands of Torah and those of woodworking.

Measure Twice and Cut Once:
What is required to repair the brokenness in our world is not haphazard attempts at repair, quick bandaids to fundamental problems, rather we need to be precise and considered in how we approach the needs of our community. We need to study the problem before we fix the problem, and not confuse patchwork with repair work. Sometimes repair itself is not enough and the challenges facing our community, like those that face the Gulf Coast, require not a Bandaid or a fix, but a complete remodel; a reworking and revisioning of how we deliver aid and relief to those in distress; but we can't forget the second half of the dictum, to cut once. We must eventually and deliberately move from the study to the doing, from measuring to cutting.

As you go out in to our community this weekend to repair, be observant Jews, notice the problem you are there to repair, study it, understand it, measure it. We may indeed be applying a bandaid in this one day effort, but if we can get to its root cause, if we can understand the fundamental problem, maybe all of us can come back and fix it for good, that is the power that we have as a community, it is as Rabbi Goor said during the High Holy Days the difference between social action which we do this weekend, and social justice which requires more of us, all of us.

The Right Tool for the Right Job:
I must have 2 dozen different screwdrivers on my workbench at home, just as I must have nearly the same number of different prayer books on my shelf in my office. I know what you are thinking, Jews with Tools, what does a rabbi need with some many screwdrivers. But in truth the reasons for both are the same, each is just slightly different enough that one may be better than the other for a particular task. The on going work of this congregation must be to bring our diverse and extensive resources to bare on the challenges we face. We are the tool box, and we must work together to repair the brokenness in our community. Next week you will receive a survey card in the mail from the temple asking you to articulate the particular skills and talents that you can offer our community. We are building our tool box, we are going to work, we are fixing the world, that is our sacred job.

If it doesn't fit hit it with a hammer, if it still doesn't fit its scrap:
Sometimes, despite the best laid plans and most precise measurements, things just don't come together as planned. We invest so much time and energy and it still doesn't work, it is then that must try harder, and after trying harder, if it still doesn't work then we scrap

it and start over again, and out of our scrapped and broken pieces may be the foundation of our new design. The most satisfying feeling when building something with your hands is to be able to stand back at the end of the day and look at what you created, the hardest part is to look with a critical eye at that same creation and see that it doesn't work or doesn't fit. If we are committed to lasting change, then we will want to make lasting repair, build things that last. The prophet says, there is a time to tear down and a time to build up, sometimes you must start over, in order to do it right. As a congregation, community and a nation we must be bold enough to look at old problems from a fresh perspective, Einstein's definition of insanity comes to mind, doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. Health care, poverty, discrimination, war, disease, famine, homelessness, these old problems need new solutions, we have been hitting them with a hammer long enough. Tomorrow morning Rabbi Bender will lead a Tikkun Olam text study at our West Campus as we look to our ancient texts for the basis of our new ideas.

There is always something to fix in a house, things break, wear out. But having living in an apartment all of my adult life, the difference with a house is that you also have the ability to create and dream, you can add on, you can build up, you can replant. Tikkun Olam is about the daily work of repair and maintenance of the world, but it is also about dreaming, of what the world could be if we torn down the walls the divide us, if we laid a new foundation, if we planted a tree that will one day bear fruit. Let us be builders, and planters and dreamers together, we are God's tools box, and we are the right tool for this sacred job.