# ONE OF THE 36

It is said in Jewish tradition that at all times there are 36 special people in the world, and that were it not for them, all of them, if even one of them was missing, the world would come to an end. The two Hebrew letters for 36 are the *lamed*, which is 30, and the *vav*, which is six. Therefore, these 36 are referred to as the *Lamed-Vav Tzadikim, or Lamed Vavniks*. This widely-held belief, this most unusual Jewish concept is based on a Talmudic statement to the effect that in every generation 36 righteous "greet the Shechinah," the Divine Presence (*Sanhedrin* 97b; *Sukkah* 45b).

And who, we might ask, are these righteous ones? Well, while their great deeds are easy to describe, they themselves are very difficult to identify. You may feel you are in there presence, but when you look around, you cannot find them. Legend maintains that they are each extremely modest and upright, often concealing their identity, hiding it even from their own children. In fact were you to approach one, confront them with the noble fact that they are indeed to be counted among the righteous they would fain ignorance, shoo you away with a shy smile and downcast eyes. "No", they would say, "I'm just doing what I can, but thank you for the compliment."

I have a secret to share, which is actually not a secret at all, everyone in this room knows it to be true, save one person, who according to tradition we are not allowed to tell. There has been a Lamed-Vavnik sighting in this room tonight, yes right here, in all places the Westin Hotel. You see for as long as I can remember I have been tracking this one particular person, certain that they were indeed a Lamed Vavnik, and tonight, as much as she may display disbelief, as much as she may insist otherwise, we have, I know, finally uncovered her not so secret true identity.

I first discovered her Lamed Vavnikiness, when I was a teenager. I came home one night and discovered that our home on Avocet had been wrapped in Toilet Paper from roof to stoop. The culprits were pretty obvious, it was a right of passage in BBYO, so much so that I reasoned it was probably perpetrated by some of my best friends, some of whom are here tonight. I walked in to the house to announce the shocking find to my Mom. And what did I discover; she had caught the artists of double-ply, and was at that moment serving them all hot chocolate and cookies. As they left, my mom, the Jewish mother of all of Foster City, thanked them and told them not to worry about cleaning up, Danny would take care of that, she said, just to drive home safely. It was then that I first suspected my mom, was different.

My suspicion was confirmed over the next few years as my mom began her work with Jews by choice. Mom has always tutored her students in our living room, which as many of you know is in ear shot of our kitchen and family room, a place I spent many of my after school hours. It was from that dinning room table that my mom has inspired hundreds of people to become Jewish, and it was also from that dinning room table that my mom inspired at least one Jewish kid to become Rabbi. To watch her teach is true art and poetry. Her passion for her students and for Judaism is ever present. From the cookies and love she serves each of her students, to her patient explanations and colorful

descriptions of Jewish rituals and traditions. But to listen to her teach, through the closed door of our dinning room, that was for me the true inspiration. With only her voice and the tears, laughter, ahahs, oh mys, and even a few amens of her students, she conveyed to them and to me all that is kodesh, holy and special about Judaism and Jewish community. I wish everyone of my congregants could spend an afternoon with my mom at our dinning room table, God knows she would love to cook for them. For if they could, they would gain in that one afternoon more understanding and appreciation for the sanctity and efficacy of Judaism than I could ever hope to teach them. In that one afternoon they would truly see in my mom's example, how living a Jewish life, helps you live a better life.

Judaism teaches that one should make there home a Midash Ma'at, a sanctuary in miniature. 269 Avocet court has long been just that, its alter is our dinning room table, its ark our refrigerator, its rabbi, my mom, and its membership numbers in the thousands, all of those who have sat at her side as she has brought Torah to there lives.

The lamed-vavniks, scattered as they are throughout the Diaspora, have no acquaintance with one another. On very rare occasions, one of them is "discovered" by accident, in which case the secret of their identity must be carefully guarded. The lamed-vavniks do not themselves know or believe that they are one of the 36. In fact, tradition has it that should a person claim to be one of the 36, that is proof positive that he or she is certainly not one. Since the 36 are each exemplars of *anavah*, humility, having such a virtue would preclude against one's self-proclamation of being among the special righteous. The 36 are simply too humble to believe that they are one of the 36.

So each of here tonight have a secret to keep, which shouldn't be that hard, since when you think about it the entire Jewish community is here, so who are we going to tell. Patti Moskovitz is a Lamed Vavnik, and if kids can schep nachus on there parents, then permit me to schep. My mom helps sustain the world, by serving countless cookies, cups of tea, and extra helpings of her Jewish neshama to people who are thinking about becoming Jewish. My mom helps sustain the world by being part of a Minyan, and writing about their sacred assemblies. My mom helps sustain the world by teaching Bar and Bat Mitzvah students to love and understand the prayers and verses they are learning to read. My mom helps sustain the world by living Torah in every aspect of her life, with my Dad, my brother and sister, our spouses, her grand children. My mom helps sustain the world by sharing that love of Judaism with each of you in ways to numerous to count. She is a Lamed-vavnik, of this I am certain, but lets keep that just between us, she wouldn't believe us anyway.