1. Thank yous to Stacy, the Adult Advisory Board, and most of all to the AZA and BBG for selecting me as the Distinguished Alumn.

There is a company in Texas that for a fee of $500 will allow you to go back to kindergarten for a day. For $500 you can wear mismatched socks, finger paint, play with blocks, drink apple juice, eat graham crackers and have nap time. They have a waiting list 3 months long.

For those alumni in the room, what would you pay to go back to BBYO for a day, for a weekend convention, for a conclave, a semi-formal dance, for a softball game, or a night hanging out with you buddies after a chapter meeting? It brings to mind the formula of mastercard commercials. Imagine the images floating across a TV screen as the announcer intones, convention T-shirt - $10, bottle of Polo aftershave - $15, a corcage that attaches at the wrist so as to avoid an embarassing moment in front of her parents - $35, to be a BBYOer again if only for a weekend – PRICELESS.

PRICELESS is how I view my time in BBYO. INVALUABLE I guess would be another term that I use often as well. No other experience, so shaped who I was as a teen, and no other experience had more influence on who and what I would become as an adult than did BBYO. I know that this is not true for all of you, for some BBYO was one in a series of powerful, character building experiences, it along with college, graduate school, travel abroad formed the foundation upon which you have built your professional and personal lives. Those experiences were formative for me as well, but none was more influential, more directly connect with who and what I am today than my time in BBYO. And so I consider myself uniquely blessed and fortunate to receive this award form an organization that has already given me so much.

When Stacy called me a couple of months ago and informed me that the youth had selected me to receive this great honor, I began to think immediately about what I would say when given the opportunity. How would I explain the impact of BBYO on my life, how would I draw upon the lessons I learned then, lessons that continue to instruct and inspire me today, and illuminate them for you today?

I'm a Rabbi and I write sermons and speeches all the time, to give you a glipse into my professional life, I give a speech/talk/sermon about two or three times a week. I crank them out pretty quickly, you kinda have too with so many. And in a skill I learned from my time as Grand Aleph Godol, I often don't prepare a text at all, but speak extemporaneously from mental note cards all the time. But big sermons, important speechs, a High Holy Day sermon for example often takes me months to prepare. Most Rabbis will admit that their first thought after the High Holy Days, is "now what am I goingt o speak about next year?"

Like many of my colleagues I keep a file in my desk and throughout the year I fill it with articles and photographs that I think might serve as a good topic for a High Holy Day address. I'll ruminate on my potential topics for months, maybe try out an idea in a Friday night sermon or a Bar Mitzvah talk and see if it has legs so to speak.

So when Stacy called me and honored me with today I knew that I would have far less time than I needed to prepare some thoughts on something that is so important to me. I also thought that my file folder of sermon ideas was going to be of little help. Not because none of them related to BBYO, in fact it was just the opposite that was true, nearly everything in my folder related in some way to BBYO, so profound was my experience in our summer programs, in leadership positions, in worship services, and Jewish identity building programs,

that I know I still see things as a rabbi through the unique perspective of a BBYOer. An organization that has at its core the seven cardinal principals and a menorah pledge that are still today a part of my value system.

But looking into that folder I found an article I clipped on Sunday from the New York Times magazine. The article, was on the history of the handshake as a social convention in the United States. (Another reason why the NY Times is such a great paper).

The Handshake first became a social convention, a common way to greet a stranger or acquaintence more than 200 years ago in the American west. Like so many things its popularity grew out of necessity, as society needed a way to greet one another in an age when everyone was carrying a gun that could be fired with one hand. Thus the handshake came into fashion as a way to tell if the person approaching you was carrying a gun, or intended you harm, you oculd firmly grasp one hand and at the same time keep the other hovering over your sidearm just in case. So really the handshake was the first attempt at 'arms control'

Anyhow, as I look back over my time in BBYO, and the influence and impact that experience has had on me as a student and now a Rabbi in our community significant and lasting moments seem to center around handshakes of one form or another. I know it seems kind of an odd thing, to view such a formative and life altering experience through something as impersonal as a handshake. But then again, I think that is one of the things that makes BBYO so remarkable, because countless times, it was a simple handshake that conveyed to me a sense of welcomeness, belonging and identity that is almost beyond description.

Back to the mastercard commercial metaphore for a moment few handshakes in particular stand out as being PRICELESS, their value and what they represented being nearly beyond description, but I would like to try.

- First softball game as a 7th grader. The AZA handshake, not yet a member not given it, and wanting to belong so I could know what it meant. Being allowed to play, and invited out afterwards even though I made a ton of errors. Because what matter in BBYO, unlike organized sports, was ME, not how I performed on the field. I got better.

- My chapter advisor, shaking my hand to congratulate me after planning my first regional program. I mattered to adults, and was respected by adults for what I could do and offer. It was a Refusniks Simulation, Bat got loose in dinning hall, kept everyone calm, we don't do refusenik simulations anymore, BBYO had something to do with that too.

- Meeting Rabbi Bruce Aft at Kallah, playing catch (baseball again) he throw and I asked him questions about being a rabbi. Now I go to kallah every year and we are rabbis on staff together, its in my contract and I leave for camp this year in just a few weeks. The most terrifying moment for me in the recent financial crisis that hit BB and the reason most of all I flew to DC last year to try and change the course of things, was the fear that we would loose those programs and the difference they make the lives of so many, including me.

- The handshake that never happened (Atawater story) BBYO got me there, being GAG pretty amazing.

- Lastly a story that some of you may have already heard, ordination Rabbi Z, Rick, Lewis, Sid  Couldn't come off the bima till I gave the AZA handshake (my ring)

Pulling it all together:
PRICELESS what would you give to have it all back, if you can go back, then what would you give to ensure that another generation of Jewish youth grow up with what you had.

CHILDREN AS GARENTORS OF TORAH MIDRASH.