

On Tuesday night at our annual Shavuot Tikkun, we opened with some thoughts about the importance of study to Jewish life. I referred to a debate in the Talmud over which is greater: study or action, meaning the performance of mitzvot. After some debate, the Sages conclude that study is greater, because study leads to action. Indeed, in Jewish thought, the integrity and value of studying Torah is measured by how concretely it affects the way we live our lives and the contributions it inspires us to make to our communities and the world around us.

I write this from a setting that brings this insight to life in the most meaningful way: the Bergen County Conference on Elder Abuse. This 3rd annual conference, which brings together officials from Bergen County governmental and social service agencies, the state's Chief Prosecutor's Office, healthcare workers and concerned citizens, had its beginnings in no grander a space than Sha'ar Communities' Gate of Study's weekly Beit Midrash program.

About 7 years ago, at the culmination of a year of study about the Torah's perspectives on family relationships, I turned to my beloved students and friends and asked them how our study together will impact the way they live their lives and nurture their relationships. The discussion turned to how their learning could make a difference in the lives of those whose families and relationships were unhealthy, namely, those who suffered from abuse. It then focused on a particular area of family dynamics that sadly suffers from increasing abuse but remains under the public's radar, namely, elder abuse. And thus was borne SAAFE: Save Abused and Frail Elderly, a fully recognized non-profit organization that is dedicated to raising awareness of elder abuse and working for its eradication. Envisioned and run by women and men who are themselves in their post-retirement years, SAAFE is credited with putting the urgency of dealing with elder abuse on the agenda of the Jewish and general community here in northern New Jersey.

Please join me in wishing our Tuesday morning Beit Midrash group a heartfelt "Yishar Kochechem" and "Thank You" for creating SAAFE and for protecting the quality of life of those who remain amongst our most vulnerable. And join me in feeling not a small measure of pride in the role Sha'ar Communities has played in inspiring this critical expression of how the study of Torah leads to action that literally changes the world.

Rabbi Heschel taught, "A test of a people is how it behaves toward the old." The members of SAAFE have passed that test beyond measure. And we in Sha'ar Communities have done so as well. Blessed as we are with the vital and energetic presence of individuals in their 70s and 80s in each of our Gates, we have been given the opportunity to learn from and with one another and truly bring the generations together as we build a kehillah kedoshah, a sacred community. Indeed, celebrate with us tonight at Shabbat services where we say "L'chayim" to Sonny Better on the occasion of her 88th birthday.

May Sonny and all of us be blessed to 120, and may Sha'ar Continue to grow and thrive with us.