

## Starry Nights Speech

By Zach Paikin

Good evening, and thank you. Bonsoir, et merci. It's an honour and a privilege to be here tonight and to receive this award. And it was even *more* of an honour and a privilege for my Jewish parents to happily foot the bill to put me on a train from Montreal to Toronto for this event.

In the second paragraph of the Aleinu, a Jewish declaration said near the end of every prayer session, we find the words "L'Taqen Olam B'Malkhuth Shaddai": to better the world in God's kingdom. I truly believe that these four words sum up the philosophy of Judaism. This phrase deals with the "person to person" aspect of life first and foremost: it is our duty to better the world for one another, yet never to forget that we live in God's much larger realm.

It's truly remarkable to think about the fact that there are well over 6 billion people in our world. This gathering here tonight suddenly appears small in comparison. An obvious question presents itself: "What difference can one person truly make in a world so big?"

I strongly believe that each and every life represents a universe in itself. To save a life is to save an entire universe. This gives the first African-American in Major League Baseball Jackie Robinson's saying true meaning: "A life is not important other than in the impact it has on other lives."

Only through awe can one obtain wisdom. That awe comes from the realization of just how small we truly are. And only with wisdom can worship become meaningful. That worship of God is more than just putting on tefillin every morning. It is more than just studying Torah. That worship is taking action to make God's world a better place.

We are more than just Jews. We are citizens of the world. What that means is that we, as a people, need to use our history to truly save lives.

In Hebrew, the word for "past", *kedem*, and "forward", *kadima*, are derived from the same root. Our past is in front of us to analyse, not to put behind us to forget. As a people that suffered from the worst genocide in the history of mankind, it is our duty to prevent the reoccurrence of suffering and hate. When we say "never again", we need to mean it. One million human beings were slaughtered in Rwanda in 1994 over a span of merely 100 days because the international community was paralysed by its own system.

Now, to this day, over 450,000 Darfurians have been killed since 2003 in the first genocide of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Each and every one of them was a human being with a life, a conscience, a family, friends, a past, and dreams of a better

future. These mass-killings, rapes, and destructions of villages have been happening before our eyes for over six years.

Bettering the world can be done one small action at a time. One small thing that we can all do is to program the number 1-800-GENOCID (436-6243) into our phones. When you find a couple of minutes of spare time, call the number, and leave a message at the Prime Minister's office. It starts with this small action, yet *each call* will pay tribute to the more than 450,000 lives that have been lost by brutal slaughter or death by starvation. *Each call* will help improve the quality of life for the more than 3 million displaced refugees in the region.

You don't have to be Mia Farrow to make a difference. When she travels to Sudan to advocate for the rights of Darfuri refugees, when she does work for UNICEF, when she fasts to raise awareness about the undemocratic political regime in Sudan, she does so to show that you can make a difference too. Ms Farrow, I would like to personally thank you for all of your phenomenal work to bring justice to the world and to help those in need. Your actions have inspired me, among others, to take the lead in my community.

*Never* should the international community be paralysed by being incapable of defining the word "genocide". When people are in need of live-saving help, the leaders of the world need to take action. And they only will if we will.

If there's one thing that the phrase "L'Taqen Olam B'Malkhuth Shaddai" teaches, it's that humility and the ability to effect change are not mutually exclusive. We too can all make a difference in the lives of others. But at the end of the day, the power to decide that we *will* make that difference resides within *ourselves*.

So stand up for what you believe in. Encourage others to do so. Take meaningful action.

Shalom alechem, as-salamu aleykum, may peace be with all of you. Thank you, merci.