

Yizkor 2022: The Toolbox
By: Rabbi Joshua Segal
Congregation Beth Shalom, Clifton Park, NY

My father was never the handiest person in the world, a point my mother would never let him forget, but he had a toolbox. In it were left-over nails, screws, nuts, and bolts from a lifetime of projects. In addition to tools, which one might logically expect, there were washers of all sorts, hooks, latches, door hardware – you name it.

When my father died – last April was his 57th *yahrzeit*, I looked at this old rusting toolbox. It seemingly had no value. As I looked through it, it contained cut nails from an era before extrusion became the process for making nails. It had all sorts of other *chach-kas*, but for no good reason, at least in my own mind, I didn't throw it away.

As I've gone through life, I can't tell you how many times I was working on something and found myself missing a part, which, as if by magic appeared in my father's toolbox. Pragmatically, the tool box saved me a few dollars and more importantly, the time of the trip to the hardware store, but the feeling that I always get when I find something in the tool box is that today, I received a little gift from my father.

Similarly, my father left me a toolbox to deal with the spiritual aspects of life. What he left me in my youth – I was not quite 19 when he passed away – seemed in many ways to be a rusty old tool box filled with stories of the past and a way of life called Judaism, that I took for granted.

Taking the broadest definition of Torah as the totality of life, what my dad gave me was a tool box with the nails, screws, nuts, bolts, tools, hooks, latches, etc. from a lifetime of his living and culled from thousands of years of history in general and Jewish history in particular. What he left me was incomplete, just as what I teach you will be incomplete, just as what you teach your children will be incomplete.

But like the physical toolbox, I add to it, I expand it, I incorporate things my father never knew; & occasionally, I discard something. But just like the old rusty toolbox, there are times when I am feeling drained of life's energies where I dig into his spiritual legacy and in that way too, I received another little gift from my father.

This is a guarantee: give your kids or your grandkids a toolbox, today. It is truly a gift that will keep on giving for a lifetime.