

Eighth Annual Semikha Ceremony

Rabbanit Devorah Zlochower

Dean



Good evening. It is my honor this evening to pay tribute to four women, the soon to be מוסמכות of our core four year semikhah program: Atara Cohen, Jennifer Geretz, Michal Kohane and Gloria Nusbacher. טוב מזל to each of you on this incredible achievement.

A relationship forged in the study of תורה goes beyond an exchange of ideas, it is an encounter - sometimes a partnership, occasionally a battle. Students of Torah are seeking nothing less than to know God through God's Torah. Torah study is a place where souls meet and deep friendships form. Gloria, Michal, Jennifer and Atara, I am blessed and have been so enriched by my time learning with each of you and the rich relationships that have, thank God, resulted.

The 6th פרק of אבות begins with a lengthy description of one who is עוסקת בתורה לשמה - one who is deeply engaged in the study of Torah for its own sake. As I learned through this ברייתא, phrases jumped out at me, beautiful descriptions of the עוסקות בתורה לשמה that are standing before us now.

Michal:

נקרא ריע אהוב אהוב את המקום אהוב את הבריות

One who studies and teaches Torah with your passion is called a friend, beloved, a lover of God, a lover of humankind. Michal, I am thinking of אליהו בהר הכרמל. You too burn with the fire of Torah. But unlike אליהו whose אהבת המקום was not always equalled by אהבת הבריות, Michal, you are much more a משה רבינו, אהבת ישראל, for teaching Torah is an act of love.

Gloria:

ומכשרתנו להיות צדיק וחסיד וישר ונאמן

Torah is a מכשיר, it equips one to be righteous, pious, upright and trustworthy. Gloria, you personify ישרות - integrity in both its intellectual and moral sense. As anyone who has had the pleasure of learning with you knows, and I have, you have a piercing mind which goes straight to the heart of the matter. And your moral conduct, the way you treat your peers, your students, teachers and friends is truly an exemplar of ישרות - upright conduct.

Jennifer:

ונהנין ממנו עצה ותושיה בינה וגבורה

All who are in her orbit benefit from her wise counsel, sound knowledge, discernment and strength. What an apt description of who you are, Jennifer. Wise, discerning and strong - qualities that have propelled, I daresay compelled, this Torah journey. And at its heart is the wise counsel you provide friends, family, congregants, coworkers and patients.

Atara:

ומגלין לה רזי תורה ונעשה כמעין המתגבר וכנהר שאינו פוסק

To the tireless student of Torah are revealed its secrets. She becomes an ever-flowing spring and a river that does not cease, adding more and more to the Torah she receives. Atara, thirst for Torah has been your hallmark your entire life. And, in turn, you have become a deep well of knowledge, a source of Torah and of inspiration for your students and peers.

Back to the beginning of the ברייתא:

ר' מאיר אומר כל העוסק בתורה לשמה זוכה לדברים הרבה ולא עוד אלא שכל העולם כלו כדי הוא לו.

Those who occupy themselves with the study of Torah merit many things. Not only that, but they are deserving of the entire world.

May we continue to be blessed by your Torah as you now enter the רבנות and may you indeed experience its rewards. Keep learning, keep teaching in good health and safety.

וכן יהי רצון