



dedicated learning. dynamic leadership.

**8th Annual
Semikha Ceremony
June 9, 2020**

Speech Compendium

Rabba Sara Hurwitz **President & Co-Founder**



Welcome to Yeshivat Maharat's Eighth Annual Semikha Ceremony.

It was not obvious that we would arrive at this moment today. Indeed, our world and lives have been affected by chaos, illness, and unrest. There are fires burning around us, deep rooted racism and injustice to combat, and fear of a world we barely recognize that we must now confront. These last few days, weeks and months have wreaked havoc, and first and foremost I want to honor the memories of those who have lost their lives from illness and from baseless violence. And, I wish a speedy healing and recovery to those who are struggling. The effects of Covid-19 and world unrest have created other kinds of loss as well -- like not celebrating milestone events in person such as this one,

In the face of loss and discord, rabbinic tradition understood that we may be rendered speechless, and so provided us with a liturgical phrase to fallback on.

As explained in Masechet Brachot (Mishna 9:2)

וְעַל שְׂמוּעוֹת רָעוֹת אוֹמֵר בְּרוּךְ דֵּין הָאֱמֶת:

Upon hearing bad news -- and for the Mishna, bad news includes death and loss in general -- one says, "Blessed be the true judge."

And yet here we are, in spite of all that is lost, celebrating.

You see, in the same sentence that acknowledges loss, the gemara recognizes that the world is also full of miracles, bounty, and goodness. And, so, the Mishna explains that there is also language that we say upon hearing good news:

וְעַל הַבְּשׂוּרוֹת הַטּוֹבוֹת אוֹמֵר בְּרוּךְ הַטּוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב

"Blessed be God that is good and grants good."

The gemara elaborates (59b) and explains that this blessing is recited not only when an individual benefits, but when others stand to benefit as well.

And so, despite the loss we all feel at this moment, each and every one of today's graduates deserve to be celebrated because they are "tovot" they are each uniquely good.

And, "meitivot" they have spread goodness and kindness to others, through their Torah and leadership.

Today is a ha'tov v'ha'meitiv moment.

Allow me some literary license when I say:

הַטוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב it is good and good for the world that nine more leaders are bringing their unique talents and voices to a world in need of spiritual healing.

הַטוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב it is good that now there will be 43 graduates in the field, holding, teaching and inspiring thousands of Jews.

הַטוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב, it is good that Maharat has a stellar faculty, curriculum and staff that has prepared our students to become the compassionate and wise leaders they are today.

הַטוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב, It is good that Maharat has lay leaders and donors who understand the relevance and essential role that our graduates play in the world.

הַטוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב, It is good that we are also celebrating young leaders --- our three high school seniors selected as Emerging Scholars. We wish a mazal tov to you:

Miriam Fisch graduating from Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School in Teaneck, NJ

Noam Goldberg-Kellman graduating from SAR High School, Riverdale, NY

And Elitsa Sklar, graduating from Rochelle Zell Jewish High School, in Deerfield, IL

And, הַטוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב, it is good and good for the world that you have all joined us today in celebrating a better, more equitable Jewish future.

And so, to this year's rabbis: Jen, Michal, Atara, and Gloria, and graduating from our Executive Ordination Track: Amalia, Daniella, Agi, Judith, and Alana.

I say baruch ata hashem hatov v'ha meitiv.

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. מזל טוב 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 אהב את המקום אהב 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:

ומכשרתו 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

Rabbi Atara Cohen Core Semikha Class of 2020



Avodat Hashem, divine service, demands a near-impossible degree of hope. Whether this avodah takes the form of ancient temple service, halakhic observance, political protest, or a kind gesture to a stranger, underlying each action is a hope that the action has meaning. Each action is a manifestation of the belief that we can make the world a holier, more compassionate place. We hope that our avodah imbues the world with divinity, that through our work we can offer a small piece of redemption.

Ribono shel olam, ruler of the universe: this hope might be too much to ask of us. Our work too often feels futile in the face of the pain and chaos that surround us. Despite our best efforts, whatever good we accomplish feels too small and too temporary

Nevertheless, we persist. The prophet Yirmiyahu promises us:

וַיֵּשׁ תִּקְוָה לְאַחֲרֵיֶיךָ

there will hope for the future. We remember Yirmiyahu's assurance that there will be an end to tears, that redemption is possible. We continue in our avodat Hashem, and sometimes, just sometimes, in small miraculous moments, we do indeed see the light brought by our impact.

Rabbanit Jennifer Kotzker Geretz **Core Semikha Class of 2020**



Orthodox. Female. Rabbi. For years I prayed for the strength and the opportunity to transform these disparate parts of my identity into a joyful, harmonious whole. My individual struggle was a small part of the larger eternal work of bringing the perfect Torah into an imperfect world.

אודך כי עניתני ותהי-לי לישועה

G-d, I praise you, for you have answered me and become my salvation. The emergence of women Torah scholars, rabbis, and leaders in our day shows that we can rise to new spiritual heights by fulfilling Judaism's ancient mandate to respond to the cry of those who have been othered, disparaged and disenfranchised.

אבן מאסו הבונים היתה לראש פנה

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

I owe a great debt to the learned, holy leaders and scholars who forged this path before me, and to my colleagues and friends who walked this path with me-

מאת ה' היתה זאת היא נפלאת בעינינו

Each one of you is the work of HaShem, and each of you is marvelous in my eyes.

I am grateful beyond words to the people with whom I am privileged to share a life - my husband and best friend, Rabbi Daniel Geretz and my children, who have given me love and support at every step, my teachers, colleagues and friends in the Maayan community and also at St. Barnabas hospital, who guide me and support me as I grow into my rabbinate. I thank the Holy Blessed One who formed me in the Divine image and sustained me to reach this milestone –

זה-היום עשה ה' נגילה ונשמחה בו

This is the day the L-rd has made, let us exult and rejoice in it.

Rabbanit Michal Kohane Core Semikha Class of 2020



Pesach Sheni. My favorite holiday happens to be in this week's Torah portion, Beha'alotcha, The only holiday in the Torah not commanded by G-d, but created when people demand it in lieu of the Pesach offering they've missed. It's often explained as a model for us always getting "second chances", but that's exactly not what it's about, because otherwise, every holiday would have a second, and as we know, they don't.

Rather, Pesach Sheni is about us not waiting passively for things to happen through miracles, signs and wonders from "above", but instead noticing what's missing and seeing it as an opportunity; a space that was left for us to act positively; to add, repair and embellish the world around us from "below", with knowledge, care and, even a little bit of *chutzpa*.

Pesach Sheni is the only Torah holiday in the Hebrew month of Iyar, perhaps anticipating the future Israel holidays we recently celebrated, all humanly added with determination, purpose, love and hope. And it therefore may be no wonder that this is the parsha of our graduation, for Maharat, too, shares that spirit. Today, I am honored, proud and thankful to be counted in its legacy.

Speaking of which, a quick word of gratitude, too brief to express my feelings, to the Holy One, to my parents of blessed memory, and my children, not only for being such beautiful human beings, but for their incredible support of my journey.

Already when I was 5-6-7- years old in my father's shul, they'd call me the little rebbetzin. It was impossible to think that one day I'd be able to earn this title for myself, yet here we are today. Thank you.

Rabbanit Gloria Nusbacher **Core Semikha Class of 2020**



When I think about the role of a rabbi in our modern Orthodox society, I am reminded of a story in Masechet Chagiga that describes two encounters between teachers and students.

In one encounter, a student tells Rabbi Eliezer of a halakhic decision that was just reached by a vote of the rabbis. Rabbi Eliezer responds in outrage -- "how dare they have voted on this question. I have a tradition on this from my teachers going all the way back to Moshe Rabbenu. This is not a matter for rabbinic debate!"

In the second encounter, two students visit Rabbi Yehoshua. They relate a teaching, in the name of Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, that the task of a student of Torah is to acquire an understanding heart -- to be able to hear and understand both sides of every debate, and to develop an intuition of what God would want in the circumstances. Rabbi Yehoshua praises this teaching warmly.

So which of these teachers is my model for what a rabbi should be? The answer is -- both. Our tradition flows through Rabbi Akiva, who was a student of both these teachers, and who embodies the ability to embrace both of their conflicting approaches. We have to be able to understand the nuances of differing opinions, but also to know when we must simply hold tight to tradition. Not everything is subject to debate.

I see this as the task of modern Orthodoxy -- to live with the conflict of maintaining our tradition even when our intuition pulls us in the opposite direction, to balance the values of continuity and change. And I embrace the challenge of participating in this task as I continue to learn and teach Torah.

Rabbi Jeffrey S. Fox Rosh HaYeshiva



The Jewish people were scared. They needed Moshe Rabbeinu to go up the mountain and soften the terrifying words of Revelation. Moshe entered into the arafel - the place of unknowing, of doubt, and brought clarity and gentleness to the people at the foot of the mountain. In Perek Yud-Tet of Shemot, Moshe Rabbeinu serves as the translator for the Jewish people. We could not fully appreciate or understand the commanding voice of God. So Moshe kept going up and down the mountains, relaying the divine message to the community. To the 2020 graduates of the Yeshivat Maharat Advanced Kollel: Executive Ordination Track, you are entering the rabbinate in a time when so many are seeking a new translation for those very same echoes of Sinai, a שיר חדש that can inspire and uplift, even when mediated by a computer screen. May all of the graduates of Maharat be blessed to sing a new song of Torah.

Rabbanit Amalia Haas, your commitment to your family, your community, your bees and your Torah is an inspiration to us all. You have an intuitive understanding of people and texts. Your work at the hospital, quietly supporting people in their time of need, reverberates the echoes of Sinai: Shiru l'Hashem shir khadash. Rabba Daniella Pressner, very few people can juggle your many full-time jobs. The Akiva Academy, the community in Nashville and your amazing family are fortunate to have you. Your deep human understanding and educational insight reverberate the echoes of Sinai: Shiru l'Hashem shir khadash. Rabbanit Judith Levitan, not even the time difference to Sydney, Australia could stop you from quenching your thirst for learning. Sydney is fortunate to have a courageous Jewish leader like yourself in their midst. Your analytical mind, your clear thinking and your amazing charts have been a gift to this yeshivah. And they reverberate the echoes of Sinai: Shiru l'Hashem shir khadash. Rabbi Alana Suskin, you never let up. That tenacity is apparent in your learning and in your activism. You always reminded the shiur of the historical and ethical valence of each topic that we tackled. Your work with the Muslim community is so important in this time, and it reverberates the echoes of Sinai: Shiru l'Hashem shir khadash. Rabbanit Ági Vetö, your scholarship is a model for us all. You always wanted to make sure you really understood the core issues at play in each and every sugya we tackled. The students and community in Vassar are so lucky to have a leader and teacher like you. Your attention to both the small details and the bigger picture continues to reverberate the echoes of Sinai: Shiru l'Hashem shir khadash.

Mazal tov to the Maharat Class of 2020.

Rabbanit Amalia Haas

Advanced Kollel: Executive Ordination

Class of 2020



Today is the day that Noah's Ark landed on Har Ararat. Mount Ararat. Noah was initially reluctant to board his ark. Change can be difficult, and facing an uncharted future unnerving. I empathize with Noah because when I stepped onto the ark of Yeshivat Maharat, I was also filled with trepidation. Yet the power of this Torah education, the brilliance and devotion of our teachers, the alumni, and the intellectual integrity and kindness of my Kollel cohort, affirmed in me the identity of woman rabbi, even while the entrance of Orthodox women into the rabbinate at times meets rocky waters, indeed.

How similar and yet perhaps dissimilar has our experience been from that of Noah. Our homes have been transformed into a veritable cacophony of the ark. Our children and college students, our spouses and our own workplace responsibilities have all moved home, sliding one on top of the other. And the intense final preparations for our semikha exams have had to fit in as well.

This has been an architecture of women's entrance into the rabbanite never seen before, even at Yeshivat Maharat. We are told that the Teivah had one tzohar, one aperture, so Noah could see outside. The Gemara debates its location. Was it in the side of the ark, so Noah saw the flood descend, erasing the world he knew? Or was the aperture directly above, reassuring Noah amidst the turbulence that he had an anchor in heaven. Our training at Yeshivat Maharat prepares us to engage the world through both apertures. We combine an awareness of the world around us with a focus on our relationship with Heaven. In our work as rabbis, may we merit to be ever connected and connecting others to the holy Torah and mitzvot - the tzohar above. And may we respond with compassion, justice and truth to the tzarkhei ha-tzibur - the needs of the community, the tzohar before us.

Rabbanit Judith Levitan

Advanced Kollel: Executive Ordination Class of 2020



There are 10,000 miles and a 14 hour time difference between my home in Sydney and Maharat in New York.

We literally live a world apart.

Studying at Maharat enabled me to cross this divide. With the press of a button, only a glass screen separated us so I was both in Sydney and New York at once.

The Torah in Sefer Devarim aptly describes my experience of acquiring Torah:

הוא לא רחוקה הוא it is not far beyond reach
הוא לא בשמים הוא It is not in heaven
הוא לא מעבר לים הוא Neither is it over the sea,

כי־קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו: It is very close to you - in your mouth, your heart, and your actions.

At Maharat I learnt to live in two worlds at once in order to bring Torah close.

Halakha is familiar with the paradox of living in a parallel universe. The Gemara is replete with examples where one object is both permitted and prohibited, depending on its purpose or the context for its use.

Navigating between parallel realities is a critical skill for being an effective spiritual leader.

A Rabbi must inhabit the timeless intellectual world of halakha and dance lithely between its principles and details. Simultaneously, she must reside in the physical present moment and walk comfortably in the shoes of those who come to share their vulnerabilities, celebrate their triumphs and seek her guidance and comfort.

By living in these two worlds at once, my hope is that I can transform Torah from a distant theoretical concept into a live encounter; that I can amplify the echoes of Sinai – that intimate encounter between humanity and God - so that others can share this closeness and together we can say:

כי־קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו

Rabba Daniella Pressner

Advanced Kollel: Executive Ordination Class of 2020



The midrash Tanchuma shares a remarkable exchange between God and Israel. God beseeches the Nation תִּקְבְּלוּ תוֹרָתִי ? Will you receive my Torah? To which the Nation replies...yes. But God needs more surety “תָּנוּ לִי עֶרְבִי.” Prove it! In this very human moment, God fears that if we stand alone, we will not be able to take on the full acceptance of God’s Torah. So we suggest that our ancestors will help us take on the Torah and this is still not enough. In our final efforts, we reply בְּנֵינוּ יִהְיוּ עֶרְבִים שְׁלָנוּ . Our *children* will be our guarantors. The Torah is immediately granted *on the condition* that we will not stand alone *and* that it will be *our children’s Torah*.

What will it take to give Torah to our children? Or maybe...what will it take for our children to give Torah to us? Children are known for their honesty, persistence and passion. We learn that to pass on the Torah, we must make it authentic and dynamic for ourselves first.

תִּקְבְּלוּ תוֹרָתִי is the search for halakhic honesty and purpose. It is the charge for us to see Torah with our ancestor’s wisdom, our children’s spirit *and* our own humility. For three years in Yeshivat Maharat, I have woken up with this purpose. I now re-enter our world, with bigger questions and weightier uncertainties...this is the need for surety תָּנוּ לִי עֶרְבִי - How will I bring wisdom to our community? How will I know I am not alone? And our midrash answers--avinu...our surety is our ancestors *and*... בְּנֵינוּ and BNOTEINU...*our surety is our children*. Our surety will be our *recognition that we are not alone and* our surety will be *our* ability to engage each other with Torah that is *passionate and brave* for the rest of our lives. I pray that together, we can all live up to this challenge.

Rabbi Alana Suskin

Advanced Kollel: Executive Ordination

Class of 2020



Even if they abandon me, says God in the Midrash, as long as they keep my Torah, it will bring them back to me. According to another midrash, a person who refuses to participate in building a better world, that person is destroying the world. It might seem that these two midrashim are speaking about completely different ideas, but they're not. You cannot have halakha without God. Of course, when we commit ourselves to making society just and caring for others, God will inevitably be involved.

Similarly, if we take halakha seriously and commit to it, it is a path that leads us to care for others, bettering our society. God, Torah, halakha and justice cannot be separated from each other. I believe that it is impossible to be a religious Jew and not care about the world. I am firmly committed to halakha, and the most visible expression of that commitment is through justice work.

At Yeshivat Maharat, itself a revolutionary institution, I have felt no cognitive dissonance. My teachers, gedolim of integrity and dedication, were able to foster and strengthen both of these intertwined and interdependent commitments. At Yeshivat Maharat, we immerse ourselves in halakha in order to apply it in a wider context. We are seeds planted in Torah and halakha who will nourish not only ourselves, not only the Jews, but everyone. I have received the blessing of being a well-planted seed.

Now it is my responsibility to bring these ideals of truth and justice outside the yeshivah and into the world. May God grant me and us all the strength and wisdom to make the strong, vibrant, beautiful connection between halakha and justice real, manifest and effective.

Rabbanit Dr. Ágnes Veto

Advanced Kollel: Executive Ordination Class of 2020



The Kotzker Rebbe was once asked: "Why is Shavuot called (*z'man matan Torateynu*) 'The Time our Torah was Given,' rather than 'The time our Torah was Received?'" He answered: "The giving took place on one day, but one needs to receive it every single day."

According to *Shemot Rabbah*, when Hashem's voice came forth at Mt. Sinai, it divided itself into all seventy human languages, so that the whole world might understand it. Moreover, Hashem made sure that this "understanding" happened to each according to his or her ability. Even Moses understood Hashem's words according to his ability. The verse in *Shemot* states: "Moses spoke and Hashem answered him with a voice." Which means—according to the passage in the midrash—"in a voice that Moses could understand."

Hashem it seems, wanted everybody to have an opportunity to understand the Torah. Everybody. Even those who were not yet born, who were not yet conceived, and who became part of Israel by choice: the righteous convert, the *ger tzedek*. A delicate balance had to be maintained between the need to transmit the Torah to the *kehillah*—the community— as a whole, and the desire that it be personally, intimately understood by each individual member: Hashem could have given the Torah to just one person, but instead chose to give it to the whole community.

It seems to me that the Torah was given by Hashem to a special kind of community, one where each member counts, where each member's understanding has to be engaged by the Torah. And that is a good thing. A community is only as strong and happy and healthy as its members are. If half of the *kehillah* does not participate in the understanding of Torah then the entire *kehillah's* grasp on Torah will weaken.

Maharat is a place where women can learn Torah, a place where I learned Torah. That Torah was transmitted to an entire community, long ago, but it continues to be passed along to distinct, unique individuals, through caring and sensitive teaching by wonderful and humane teachers. I want to walk in the footsteps of my teachers, who themselves continue in the path of Hashem—I desire nothing more strongly than to be such a teacher and a transmitter myself. For this is how we can all experience standing at Sinai, being present as individuals and together as a community under the wings of the Shekhinah, the Divine Presence. Thus the *giving* of the Torah becomes the *receiving* of the Torah, for each and every one of us, each and every day.

Rabbi Daniel Sperber **Posek HaYeshiva**



I wanted to say how proud I am of each and every one of you, of your intelligence, your learning, your sympathetic perceptiveness and, above all, your devotion to Torah and to Am Yisrael. Each one of you will probably find a different function of rabbinic leadership, whether in a community or hospital, an educational framework, or some sort of activism to promote Jewish moral values. And each of you will have a pivotal role within whichever area you choose to act. As you go on into your separate ways, I wish you every success - separate ways, but keep together, and always keep learning.

Rabbi Avi Weiss Co-Founder



In solidarity with Am Yisrael, Medinat Yisrael, Tzva ha-Haganah I'Yisrael, and our nikhumim to the family of Amit ben Yigal, who recently fell. And in prayer for peace and healing I'khol yoshvei teiveil throughout the world, especially during this time of crisis. Bi'rshut Rabba Sara, Rav Jeff, Rav Daniel, Rabbanit Devorah, our board and supporters, our treasured alumnae and students and those receiving semikha today.

It's not that often that one sees his or her dreams fulfilled. And here we are, on the shoulders of those who dreamed before us. And our dream, your dream, of becoming rabbis has, b'ezrat Hashem, been realized, as you receive semikhah Toreh Toreh b'Issur v'Heter. Dreams, however, inevitably come face to face with reality. What is the difference between the two? A dream is the hope, the vision of a glorious, perfect future. Reality by definition includes

disappointments. A program that doesn't work, financial struggles, a loss of personal confidence. But the key is, when reality sets in, when disappointments set in, never to forget the dream. Once you forget the dream, it's all over because you won't be able to handle the reality. Only by keeping the dream alive, can we survive the difficulties.

When reciting Shmoneh Esrei, we first take three steps back, perhaps symbolizing that built into life will be setbacks. But then, we move forward. In fact, my father's custom was always, when moving forward, to be a trifle, just a trifle, beyond from where he started out, teaching that if we keep the dream alive, whatever the pushback, we will overcome and reach even higher levels. And so my berakhah to you, Atara, Jennifer, Michal, Gloria, Amalia, Judith, Daniella, Alana and Ágnes: Wherever you go, whatever you do, remember this moment. See this Khag ha-Semikhah like an endless, infinite reservoir of nourishment, from which you can draw strength and spiritual sustenance in the good times and bad times. Sfat Emet said it very well. On the words leikh lekha u'lekhi lakh, he writes: Tzarikh adam lehiyot mehalekh. A person must keep walking. M'madreigah l'madreigah. Whatever the challenge is, relive this moment. Remember the dream. Extend the dream beyond the beyond, and keep climbing. Keep reaching higher and higher. [Va'yomer Hashem, leikh lekha] [Leikh lekha, lekhi lakh] [Adam tzarikh lehiyot mehalekh] [she'tzarikh ha-Adam lehiyot mehalekh] [mi'madreigah l'madreigah] Mazel tov. Mazel tov.

Abigail Tambor

Executive Board Chair

Thank you so much for joining us today. We hope you are feeling inspired and energized by all you have seen and heard from our founders, faculty and graduates. The future of Jewish Leadership is bright now that we are drawing from the best and the brightest of ALL who feel called to serve in Clergy, pastoral and educational positions in our communities and institutions. Our program produces leaders who are adaptive - prepared to be proactive, think creatively and are unencumbered by the need to fit a particular mold. Their very existence breaks the mold, they exist beyond the box.

I joined the board of Maharat at its inception because I believed that in order to survive and thrive in the long run, the Orthodox community in particular and the Jewish Community at large needed to attract the best leaders - the most inspiring, the most dedicated, the most creative - regardless of their gender. It is not as if our community was in a position to turn away exceptional talent called to serve just because they happened to be women. And frankly, why should we? Why should this wealth of Torah continue to be undervalued? That would be a crime. For too long, the leadership of this community has not reflected its population, which could only be to its detriment. Beyond the injustice, it was simply bad for business in the long term. With its founding, Yeshivat Maharat sought to right this wrong, attracting, educating and ordaining a new pool of talent that had been left underserved and under-appreciated for too long.

Today, more than ever, we need great leaders, great educators and great pastoral caregivers. In these uncertain times, we need the best, most nimble and hard working clergy, chaplains and teachers to guide, teach and counsel us through the fear, the worry and this new way of life. Ritual needs to be reappraised through new eyes. Who could be more prepared, more dedicated than these women, who have moved heaven and earth to get to this place, who have overcome obstacles, nay-sayers and detractors and have said, in spite of all this, "I choose to lead." These women, who have come to Torah and ritual with new eyes and new perspectives their whole lives. These are our leaders of today and tomorrow. I, for one, could not be more reassured by their existence and more proud of their accomplishments.

So please, join us in this holy endeavor. Support our efforts today as generously as you can to ensure the health of our community in the present and in the future. Join us in this historic movement to expand the breadth of our community's Torah and our access to exceptional service and leadership. Help make the drive and passion these women feel toward their calling to lead the rule and not the exception. The bar for greatness has been reset. Each year, the sisterhood is moving towards the goal of becoming a multitude. These 9 graduates will join their 34 colleagues in the field and will support established and nascent communities, will administer to the sick and dying, will bury the dead and tend to their families and will guide us as we seek new pathways to spiritual life and fulfillment from our homes. This is what our community needs. It cannot happen without you and your support.