

**Pesach 2020/5780**  
**A 2020 Message From Our President**  
**Rabba Sara Hurwitz**  
*President and Co-Founder, Maharat*

Like the rest of New York and the world, Maharat is confronting life with the changed realities of social distancing and working/learning from home. We hope that those who are suffering from illness and loss caused by this pandemic will find some relief and healing.

Relocating to our homes has both opened up new opportunities and held us accountable to what is essential and important. Training and placing rabbinic leaders who meet the needs of those who struggle and help people make tough decisions about celebrating Passover or using the mikvah (just a couple of examples) continues to be important. We were seamlessly able to shift to zoom classrooms, as we were already set up with online learning. At the same time, this is not the year to focus on a large graduation celebration (although we will be ordaining nine new rabbinic leaders this year) or public programs. We are still using virtual platforms to deliver meaningful Torah messages and uplifting guidance to a world that needs inspiration and resources for healing.

We find ourselves in a strange reality where we are navigating between two opposing sentiments. On one hand, we yearn for freedom, filled with hope that our lives will return to “normal.” And on the other hand, we are filled with dread, drowning in the multiplicity of emotions that leave us feeling oppressed. We are holding on to radical optimism along with a healthy dose of reality.

Holding two sometimes opposing values is exactly the message of matzah. Matzah is both poor man’s bread **מַצֹּת לֶחֶם עֲנִי** (Deuteronomy 16:3) and, at the same time, the bread of freedom **מַצֹּת עֲגָת** (Exodus 12:39) that were baked on the Jewish people’s way out of Egypt, a symbolic end to their slavery. So which is it -- is matzah a symbol of oppression or redemption? It is, of course, both. A reminder that there is hope and that our world will, with time, heal. But we must not be complacent; people are struggling with their lives and livelihoods, and we must actively seek ways to bring spiritual healing to those in need. Like Rabbanit Bracha Jaffe who leads [services](#) from her home over Zoom for her Riverdale shul. Rabba Dr. Carmella Abraham published an [article](#) about Mikva use in the age of COVID-19. Rabbi Lila Kagden is consulting with mikvaot on how to keep our mikvas safe. Rabbanit Leah Sarna offered a simple [guide](#) to prepare for Passover in these times. Rabbanit Tali Schaum Broder is helping the most vulnerable as a chaplain at Columbia and Weil-Cornell.

Maharat holds both values: radical optimism with a healthy dose of reality. We continue to remain hopeful that Pesach will begin our journey toward healing and joy. And we know that the coming weeks and months will continue to be difficult. I hope you will find these essays written by Maharat students and graduates comforting and stimulating for the days ahead.



*Rabba Sara Hurwitz is Co-Founder and President of Yeshivat Maharat, and also serves on the Rabbinic staff at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale. She completed Drisha’s three-year Scholars Circle Program, and was ordained by Rabbi Avi Weiss and Rabbi Daniel Sperber in 2009. Rabba Hurwitz has received numerous awards, including being named as one of Jewish Week’s 36 Under 36, the Forward50 most influential Jewish leaders, and Newsweek’s 50 most influential rabbis. She is also a member of the inaugural class of Wexner Foundation Field Fellows.*