



Seventh Annual Semikha Ceremony June 17, 2019 Rabbi Rebecca Blady

I dedicate this moment to the people who believed in me -- who granted me the courage and freedom to do something hard, to be a part of something crazy, to be a pioneer. Thank you for empowering me. Now, it's my turn to empower others.

Just one month ago, I sat at my computer in my apartment in Berlin, Germany, surrounded by members of my community who joined me to livestream the moment my semicha klaf was signed in New York. As my colleagues in New York were singing in celebration, my colleagues in Berlin suddenly changed the tune. And they began singing, with full, empowered enthusiasm, a song we in the Berlin community love – a song whose lyrics come from the Book of Eicha.

השיבינו ה' אליך ונשובה | חדש ימינו כקדם
Return us, Hashem, to you, and we will return. Renew our days as before.

And just like that, the song of a Jewish community, once considered old and gone and illiterate, became the song of the moment. Their voices were heard, all the way here in Riverdale.

I stand before you today prepared to activate and mobilize the fringe -- the parts of the community that the majority has written off as “different,” “weird,” or “too out-of-the-box to accommodate.” To advocate for every Jewish story.

We live in an era of intersectional activism. We must not let this value pass us by. The biggest risk to this entire project would be failing to advocate for others who, like us once upon a time, could not become spiritual leaders.

The midrash tells us that the words

חדש ימינו כקדם

ought to remind us of Adam haRishon -- specifically, the moment G-d drove him out and stationed him east of Eden,

מקדם לגן עדן.

What we truly yearn for, as we beg G-d to renew ourselves, to renew our days, is a return to the first Diaspora. Contained within our call for renewal is a nostalgia for the fringe itself.

Maya Bernstein, my teacher here at Maharat, taught us the words of Amos Oz: “We do not exist simply to preserve - traditions or wonders of nature, memories of childhood or sacred objects. Lest our lives become ossified. The world is not a museum; nor is nature. Culture is also not a museum. It is permitted to touch. It is permitted to move, to move closer, to remove, to move away, to alter and to leave our stamp. Touch the rock. Touch society.”

Thank you, Ribono Shel Olam, for leading me to this day. Mazel tov to Am Yisrael.