

Eighth Annual Semikha Ceremony 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:

לא רְחֹקָה הִוא	It is not far beyond reach
לא בַּשָּׁמַיִם הִוא	It is not in heaven
לא-מֵעֵבֶר לַיָּם הִוא	Neither is it over the sea

כִּי-קָרוֹב אֵלַיךְ הַדְּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ: 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:

כִּי-קָרוֹב אֵלַיךְ הַדְּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ