

## **Ninth Annual Semikha Ceremony**

### **Rabbanit Tanya Farber**

### **Core Semikha Class of 2021**



Every quest has a beginning, though no end. I'll start my story when I was 15 or so. I vividly remember the first time I saw someone *daven*, pray with such fervor and ecstasy, like an angel from another world. And I was mesmerized, drawn in, but couldn't look because it was so intimate and exposed. And yet, I said, I want to experience that.

Same year, when I was in 10th grade, I fell in love with the Torah when we learned the Torah portion Kedoshim. "*Kedoshim tihyu*" - "You shall be holy, for I, Hashem, your God, am holy." Holiness is not something you do. You can't check it off in a box. Holy! Done! Achieved that! Next! One actually never arrives. It's only aspirational, asymptotic pursuit, forever elusive, like the lover chase in *Shir ha-Shirim*, Song of Songs. *Parshas Kedoshim* is not about ecstatic practices or mysticism, but rather laws - social, communal laws: how to build a just society, live with integrity.

In Maharat, the spiritual and legal can overlap, not fleeting ecstasy but grounded. For Halakha, Jewish law in all its intricacies, can create a deliberate, intentional God consciousness where the sacred and mundane come together. The Halakhic minutiae matter, as does the big picture, the orientation calibrated towards God and creating a better world. But it all begins with a craving, the *ahava* that animates the quest and keeps us thirsting. *Be-khol levavekha u-ve-khol nafshekha* - wholeheartedly and whole soulfully.

Rabbi Tzadok in Pirkei Avos warns: "*Al ta'aseim atara lehisgadeil bahem ve-lo kardom lakhpor bahem.*" "Do not make Torah into a crown for self-exaltation nor a spade with which to dig."



dedicated learning. dynamic leadership.

I confess, I've used Torah to build myself up but also to nurture greatness in others. When Torah assuages pain, heals wounds, rebuilds, and restores, this is not an agenda or misuse, whether thirst for Torah is from ego, egoic lack, or a lovesick soul - *nafshi kholas ahavasekha*.

What if we are already whole and holy? The Piatzetzner rebbe focuses not on the dictum "*kedoshim tihyu*" - "you shall be holy" - that unattainable aspiration, but rather "*ve-hiskadishtem vi-hiysem kedoshim ki Ani Hashem Elokeikhem*." The reflexive form of the verb implies we are already holy without striving, yearning, or change.

As you entrust me today with Torah and leadership, let's dance together between the active quest for a kinder, loving, more just world and spiritual yearning, and finding the perfection and kedushah within us right now.