

Eighth Annual Semikha Ceremony

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.