

Ninth Annual Semikha Ceremony **Rabba Sara Hurwitz** **President & Co-Founder**



Welcome to Maharat's 9th Annual Semikha Celebration honoring and celebrating this year's graduates, Tanya Farber, Dr. Liz Shayne, Yael Smooha, Lisa Schlaff, Dr. Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz, and Dr. Wendy Zierler.

"Va-yehi akhar ha-devarim ha-eile" - "And it came to pass after these things." With this phrase - "after these things" - the Torah begins the seminal story of *Akeidat Yitzchak*, the Binding of Isaac. The Rashbam immediately notes that wherever it says "after these things" - *"kol makom she-ne'emar 'akhar ha-devarim ha-eile"* - it is attached to the passage above it - *"mekhubar al*

ha-parasha she-lemal'a."

The story of Abraham's binding of Yitzchak has multidirectional significance. It introduces a new narrative but also directs the reader to interpret the story against the background of the previous literary unit. Our past experiences and the dramas of our lives make us who we are.

The traumas and blessings of this past year and over the course of our lives have shaped who we are at this very moment. As I look to Maharat's past, we would not be here without the tireless efforts of our incomparable faculty and staff. I'm grateful for the vision of our courageous founder and advisor, for our lay leaders, who contribute in ways beyond measure, and to our alumni and the many female leaders who paved the way for us to be here today. I will be forever grateful for supporting Maharat through our successes and challenges.

But we cannot remain in the past. We must use the past to not only sustain us, but to help us forge ahead. *"Akhar ha-devarim ha-eile"* means that we must face what comes next building on the past. You see, the same phrase is used once again at the end of *Akeida* story. Beginning in Chapter 22, Verse 20, we read: *"Va-yehi akharei ha-devarim ha-eile"* - "It came to pass after these matters; behold, Milcah, she also bore sons to Nahor, your brother." And Bethuel *"yalad et Rivka"* - "And Bethuel gave birth to

Rebecca." The Torah offers a list of genealogies signaling to us that after a traumatic event, birth and continuity are possible. In fact, whenever our phrase - "*va-yehi akharei ha-devarim ha-eile*" - appears in the Torah, a narrative of renewal and rebirth often follow. After trauma and loss, there's possibility and growth.

We are in an "*akharei ha-devarim ha-eile*" moment. Some of us may feel stuck, unable to imagine a world that is not scarred and fractured. But, fortified with the lessons and stories of our past, we must march forward filled with the optimism that will bring renewal and growth.

This year is Maharat's bat mitzvah year. Twelve years ago, Maharat opened its doors with three women and a vision for a different kind of community. We overcame hurdles. And, beyond my wildest dreams, today, these six graduates will join their colleagues, and 49 women will be serving the Jewish people as rabbinic leaders impacting thousands of Jewish lives. "*Akharei ha-devarim ha-eile*." The future is bright.

We also welcome three more high school graduates, young women who have joined the ranks of the six emerging scholars, selected for their commitment to learning Torah and leadership. To Cara Lopatin from Detroit, to Rivka Krause from New Jersey, and Tiffy Grossman from New York: "*Akharei ha-devarim ha-eile*." With you leading the way, the Jewish future is bright.

In our 12th year, Maharat is poised to enter a new phase of our growth and development. Our core and advanced track semikha programs will continue to be our crown jewels, but we are enrolling a plan that recognizes that Maharat is a global yeshiva, supporting our students and alumni in Australia, France, London, South Africa, and Israel, as well as all over North America.

We will seek to empower new audiences, expanding initiatives that focus on non-rabbinic participants, as well as supporting our alumni. - And we will continue to drive excellence and innovation in our core and external programs, including producing and promoting Maharat Torah. "*Akharei ha-devarim ha-eile*." The future is bright.

Friends, we are so grateful to each and every one of you for your support over these 12 years, for celebrating Maharat's successes, and for honoring today's newest rabbinic leaders - Tanya, Liz, Yael, Lisa, Lindsay, and Wendy - with your leadership and scholarship, and all you've already contributed to the world. "*Akharei ha-devarim ha-eile*." The future is bright.