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**9th Annual  
Semikha Ceremony  
June 15, 2021**

**Speech Compendium**

## **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 Smoocha, 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



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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.

## **Ninth Annual Semikha Ceremony**

### **Rabbi Jeffrey S. Fox**

### **Rosh HaYeshiva and Dean of Faculty**



This has been a year of social distancing and divine seeking.

The Mishna and Gemara teach us that the Shekhina is present when people are sitting and learning, when davening, and even gathering for court cases. When we seek God, God is made to feel present. This is true for a group of 10, five, three, or even just one person.

The rabbis understood that there is something special about a group who gather in worship, that being physically present with others helps to feel the warmth of another and ultimately of God. And they also understood that such an experience may not always be possible, that there may be times in human history when not even 10 could gather in one space, and we would still need to find God.

How do we know when the Shekhina is present? There's nothing to see or touch, and yet, her reality comes with particular Halakhic significance in terms of which parts of the tefilla we may or may not recite. Is the Shekhina present on Zoom or on a livestream? How do we find God in 2021?

Rabbi Yitzchak teaches that if someone claims to have worked hard, but not found - "*yagati ve-lo matzati*" - they should not be believed. If they claim to have found but not worked hard - "*lo yagati u-matazti*" - they also should not be believed. Only the person who worked hard can be believed to have found. "*Yagati u-matzati.*"

The Gemara immediately limits the idea to the context of hard work within the realm of Torah study. I'd like to offer that the same can be claimed for seeking to find God's presence, that perhaps "*matzati*" means I have found the Shekhina. This is true in our Talmud Torah, in our davening, in our interactions with our friends, and yes, even on Zoom.

The fundamental job of a rabbi is to support others in their search to find God, even when things feel dark, to answer the clarion call of Evan Hansen: “Even when the dark comes crashing through, when you need a friend to carry you, and when you're broken on the ground, you will be found.”

The students of Yeshivat Maharat serve as a model to me and, indeed, to all of us of what it means to work hard - *yagati* - and to seek to find God - *u-matzati* - in our world today.

Allow me to introduce the three graduating musmakhot of 2021, who live this simple idea every day of their lives.

Tanya Farber, you have been the anchor and the heart of our beit midrash for many years. Your neshama inspires all who are blessed to know you. Your gentle neshama seeks God in all that you do. Tanya, *yagat u-matzat*.

Dr. Liz Shayne, you have worked hard through many, many years of school, as have Ayel and Chasdai been hard workers on screen in yeshiva this year. You invented the Shekhinameter, the tool by which we measure the divine presence, and you should know and be confident that the Shekhina already resides in all that you do. Dr. Liz Shayne, *yagat u-matzat*.

Yael Smootha, your commitment to your students and to your family guides you as you walk through the world. You are a gifted teacher, a lover of Torah, and a hard worker. Your ability to listen and hear the question behind the question brings God into every conversation. Yael Smootha, *yagat u-matzat*.

Mazal tov to all the graduates.

## **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."



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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 Piatetzner 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.

## **Ninth Annual Semikha Ceremony**

### **Rabbanit Dr. Liz Shayne**

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



In the 9th responsum of the Minchat Shlomo, on the topic of using loudspeakers and microphones on Shabbat, the author, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, takes a moment to discuss the question of wearing hearing aids and, by association, eye glasses on Shabbat when there is no eiruv. What is extraordinary about this section is not his conclusion, that such things are manifestly allowed, but his approach. He resuscitates the concept of the *kamea ha-mumkhe*, the amulet that has proven its efficacy, and he argues that, *mutatis mutandis*, our medical devices fulfill similar roles for us in the services they perform and deserve the same exemption from the laws of carrying on Shabbat.

Rabbi Auerbach's point is not that glasses are a magical amulet to improve our vision. His point, rather, is that we are not so different from our Halakhic ancestors. The questions we grapple with at Maharat about the role of assistive devices, projected voices, presence, absence, and telepresence all have their antecedents in Halakhic history, and we just need to know how to look for them.

Our Halakhic creativity is both driven by and inspired by the creativity of those who preceded us, on and on, in a chain that stretches all the way back. We have spent four years building the future by immersing ourselves in the past and taking on the challenges of the present. In these moments, when the texts expand to meet the demands of the day, and we stretch to be the women we are called by this era to be, it feels like being touched with the briefest brush of the divine. When we think we are at our most innovative, most creative, most topsy-turvy, we are also closest to Hashem and most deeply enmeshed in the Halakhic tradition we adore. As JRR Tolkien reminds us, "We make still by the law in which we're made."



## **Ninth Annual Semikha Ceremony**

### **Rabbanit Yael Smootha**

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



One of the most famous words quoted from the Torah are to love our fellow as ourselves. "*Ve-ahavta le-reiakha kamokha.*" Yet, what precedes these famous words is just as important as the words themselves: not to hate our brother in our hearts, but instead, to speak to him directly. "*Lo tisna et akhikha bi-lvavekha. Hokheakh tokhiakh et amitekha.*" "Don't hate your brother in your heart." Don't harbor resentment, but rather confront him, and eventually, you will come to love him.

But how do we confront others in a way that brings us to love? How can we truly let the other person know how we feel without pushing them further away?

The Or ha-Chaim, the 18th century Moroccan commentator on the Torah, writes that in order for this to happen, it is essential that we approach our friend judgment-free, assuming that our friend had no intention to hurt us. Only through honest yet loving communication can true closeness exist. - Only then, can we love our fellow as we love ourselves.

Yes, we need to speak up about our hurt, but only if we let go of our judgment will our words lead to greater closeness.

In my pastoral training at Maharat, the art of navigating difficult conversations was a skill that was modeled again and again. In conversations with my fellow students, in studying the difficulties that arise across the human spectrum, and in our leadership class, Maharat has not only encouraged me to make my voice heard, but given me the sensitivity and language I need to treasure the humanity in others, no matter what their story, and model for others the generosity of spirit we all need to feel in order to be connected to each other.

## **Ninth Annual Semikha Ceremony** **Rabbanit Devorah Zlochower** **Rosh Yeshiva and Academic Dean**



*"Yoru mispatekha le-Ya'akov ve-Toratkha le-Yisrael. Yasimu ketora be-apekha ve-khalil al mizbekhekha."* "They shall teach your judgments to Jacob and your Torah to Israel. They shall place incense in your nostrils and burnt offerings upon your altar."

In the final parsha of the Torah, Moshe Rabbeinu blesses the tribes. This verse is one of the verses addressed to Moshe's own tribe, the tribe of Levi. Our tradition teaches us that nowadays, *"Ein lo la-Kadosh Barukh Hu be-Olam el arba amot shel Halakha."* God's place in this world, in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple, is the world of Torah study. And so, the teachers of Israel are our tribe of Levi, tasked with serving God by teaching God's people.

The words of this passuk are words of blessing and promise and are a sacred mission for the teachers of the Jewish people.

A berakha: May you who are tasked with ensuring the flourishing of our tradition, may your Torah find favor before God, sweet as the incense offered in the past. May your devotion and sacrifice know its ultimate goal, the broadening of our minds and the nurturing of our souls.

A promise: As long as individuals step forward to do this godly work, God's presence remains in our midst, and mishpat, justice, is an attainable goal.

This most sacred mission, that of teaching Torah and providing moral guidance, guarantees our future as a people. Who is tasked with this responsibility? Rashi has a play on the words *"yoru mispatekha le-Ya'akov."* He says: *"Reuyin elu le-khakh?"* "Who are those who teach God's laws? Those who are deemed worthy of that task."

Lindsey, Lisa, and Wendy, you are truly "*reuyot le-khakh*." You have devoted your lives to teaching Torah, a Torah that seeks truth without compromise, shows the holiness that abides within the lives of our people, challenges our young adults to live Jewish lives of meaning, and lifts our spirits with the words of the sweet singers of Israel. "*Neimot zemirot Yisrael*."

But "*yoru mispatekha le-Ya'akov*" is not only about teaching. This phrase today, and the term "*lehorot*" in the rabbinic context, has a very particular meaning. The Gemara in *Sandhedrin*, *Daf He*, *Amud Alef*, tells us that when Rav was going down to Bavel to assume his rabbinic role, Rebbe Khiyya, Rav's uncle, approached Rebbe to ask him to endow Rav with rabbinic authority. The conversation began: "*Yore?*" "May he rule on ritual matters?" To which Rebbe responded, "*Yore*." "Yes, he may."

We have changed that question and answer into a title. *Yore, Yore* - or in your case, *Tore, Tore*, a person who has rabbinic authority, the knowledge and the right to rule on matters of Halakha, Kashrut, Shabbat, Niddah, and Avelut. A resounding yes to the question "*Tore?*" has taken a very long time in the history of our people, as you three well know. But it also took your dedication, the dedication you made to add this particular body of Torah learning to all the other learning, teaching, and writing you have been doing for decades. It has been my honor to learn with you, not only in our Hilkhhot Niddah class this year, but in years past. I have sat next to and learned from each of you.

Wendy, you and I are fellow back-benchers in this shul. This has afforded us the opportunity to talk Torah, Jewish literature, Mishna, and matters of great substance about our relationships to Torah, to our students, and to our community.

Lisa, I've had the pleasure of sitting with you in your office at SAR many times, also of lying on your couch. We have discussed *Masekhet Sanhedrin*, our students, why a person may decide to give all their students A's, the important topic of Igun, Morateinu Blu Greenberg, and yes, Semikha.

Lindsey, we have sat together in the Maharat Beit Midrash, and, so memorably for me, at Rabbanit Aliza's Shabbos table, as you told me about your work that honors the religious lives and rituals of women.

This is a continuation and a fulfillment of the Gemara and particularly Tosfot's instruction: "*Puk khazi mai ama davar*." "Go out and see what the people do." Torah doesn't just live in texts; it lives in the real lives of good, pious people.

Today is a simcha for you and also for Klal Yisrael. It is the full and complete affirmation of you as "*nashim khakhmaniyot ha-reuyot lehorot*," wise, learned, skilled women who are absolutely fitting to render Halakhic decisions and teach Torah with the full authority you deserve. May we continue to benefit from your Torah and your wisdom.

Mazal tov.

## **Ninth Annual Semikha Ceremony**

### **Rabbanit Lisa Schlaff**

### **Advanced Kollel: Executive Ordination**

### **Class of 2021**



As a high school educator, I'm privileged to witness many holy moments on a daily basis: the moment when a student understands the logic of a *sugiya*, the moment when a student picks up trash from the floor. But my favorite is the moment when a student actively listens, when she opens herself up and considers an opinion that challenges her own.

The Gemara in *Pesachim*, *Daf Khaf-Beit*, *Amud Beit* reads: "*Nechemia ha-Amsoni haya doreish kol etim she-ba-Torah*." "Nechemia ha-Amsoni would explicate every single word 'et' [the word that] which appears in the Torah." He believed that each time the Torah says "et," it means to include something. So

he laboriously went through each appearance of the word "et" to show what it came to include. This was a huge project, and it was his life's work.

"*Keivan she-higia le-'Et Hashem Eloheikha tira, ? Pireish. Amru lo talmidav: 'Rebbe, kol etim she-darashta, ma yehei aleihen?'*" When he came to "*Et Hashem Eloheikha tira*," - "Fear the Lord, your God" - he faced a problem. This word "et" cannot include anything else. The Torah would not tell us to fear other gods.

Poor Nechemia was now in *Sefer Devarim*, the last book of the Torah. He was almost done with his project. If nothing can be deduced from this "et," then the word "et" does not come to include something, and the entire premise of Nechemia's project has been undermined.

His students turned to him and said: "Rebbe, all of those 'ets' that you spent your life explicating, what will become of them?"



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I love the question because the students are not really worried about the *ets*. What they are worried about is, how do I respond when I am presented with a truth that shakes my core, a truth that threatens a foundational belief? "*Amar lahem: 'Ke-sheim she-kibalti sakhar al ha-derisha, kakh ani mekabeil sakhar al ha-perisha.*" Nechemia responds: "Just as I received reward for interpreting, I will receive reward for retracting." Nechemia understood that humility is a prerequisite for learning Torah.

I cannot merely map my own thoughts onto Torah, but rather, I must allow the Torah to serve as my map. I tell my students that every time we learn Torah, we make a choice to learn with a critical stance or a generous stance. Do we pull the text apart, or allow its message to shore us up? Forefront in our minds should be the question, how can this Torah shape my way of being in the world? Above all, we need to listen to the Torah and to those with whom we are privileged to learn.

I am incredibly grateful to Maharat for providing me with a learning community that approaches Torah with humility and generosity. *Barukh she-hekheyanu ve-kimanu ve-higianu la-zeman ha-ze.*

## **Ninth Annual Semikha Ceremony Rabba Dr. Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz Advanced Kollel: Executive Ordination Class of 2021**



Simchat Torah has always been my favorite festival, and indeed was the first occasion I ever entered synagogue. Since we only celebrated Shavuot a few weeks ago, it might seem a little strange to be talking of Simchat Torah. But there is a deep and dynamic connection between the two festivals which is worth exploring.

On Shavuot, we celebrate the giving of the Torah, God's self revelation, while on Simchat Torah, we rejoice in receiving the Torah, actively accepting it into our daily lives. Shavuot is a divinely-ordained festival, while Simchat Torah, as we celebrate it today, is actually a medieval tradition with which we humans have embellished an otherwise rather colorless Biblical festival. Here, too, we see divine giving, with unbounded generosity and human receiving, with joy and inventiveness.

This rich and reciprocal relationship of giving and accepting Torah, it's reflected for me in my three years of study at Maharat. My wonderful teachers have given me access to Torah with great generosity and endless patience. And it has been and continues to be my task to receive it in joy and gratitude, in order to integrate it into my own life and, in my turn, to prepare to give Torah to others. *Pirkei Avot* tells us that it is precisely in that space of Torah study, of the giving and receiving of Torah between people, that the *Shekina*, the divine presence, is to be found. Today, I celebrate and thank everyone at Maharat for giving me the tools to help others create that space of encounter between the divine and the human.

## **Ninth Annual Semikha Ceremony**

### **Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler**

### **Advanced Kollel: Executive Ordination**

### **Class of 2021**



Because I've taught for 20 years at a rabbinical school, it has long been assumed by those who have invited me to speak and teach in their communities that I was a rabbi. I have a drawer full of Rabbi Wendy Zierler name tags that were prepared for me that I was not able in good conscience to don - that is, until today. After all of these years, I am proud finally to put on a Rabbi Wendy Zierler name tag. I'm so sorry that my mom and dad, who both died during my studies at Maharat, aren't here to see me wear it.

In putting on this tag, I'm not merely adding another prefix to my name or another degree to my resume. Adding women rabbis to the Orthodox community is not simply an instance of "add women and stir". It's a paradigm shift. Rabbinic Judaism, of course, is no stranger to paradigm shifts and the kinds of reevaluations of core values that they occasion.

Take, for example, the entire institution of rabbinic prayer and the structure of the Pesach Seder, major shifts enacted after the destruction of the Temple. Or take, for example, the second and 18th *mishnayot* in the first chapter of *Pirkei Avot*. Mishna Two teaches in the name of Shimon Ha-Tzaddik, one of the last members of the *Knesset ha-Gedola*, that the world is sustained by three things, the number three corresponding to the three patriarchs: "*al ha-Torah ve-al ha-avodah ve-al gemilut khasadim*." "Torah, temple worship, and acts of loving-kindness." Mishna 18, in the name of Shimon ben Gamliel, who lived after the destruction of the Second Temple, rewrites the three things that sustain the world in light of lost sovereignty and the destruction of the Beit ha-Mikdash. Says Shimon ben Gamliel: "*Al shelosha devarim ha-olam omed. Al ha-din ve-al ha-emet ve-al ha-shalom*." Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel used to say, "Three things sustain the world: justice, truth, and peace."



The ordination of women as rabbis calls for the reformulation of the very idea of the Mesora, not only as *Pirkei Avot* but as *Pirkei Imahot*. As such, I'd like to offer a new formulation of the things that sustain the world, not just three things corresponding to the *Avot* - the three forefathers - but four, like the *Imahot* - the four foremothers. I offer these four things to highlight what has changed fundamentally with the advent of women's learning, teaching, and leadership.

*Al arba'a devarim ha-olam omed: al ha-limud ve-al ha-ahava ve-al shivyon u-shleimut.*

*Al ha-limud* - on learning, because women's learning, first and foremost, has changed everything in ways that we have only begun to appreciate.

*Al ha-ahava* - on love. Love is at the center of our daily liturgical declarations of faith - "*Ve-ahavta et Hashem Elokeikha*" - and at the center of our ethical convictions - "*Ve-ahavta le-reiakha kamokha*." And yet, it appears on neither of the prior *Pirkei Avot* lists of sustaining values. One of the contributions that women's leadership and teaching can offer is the restoration of love to the primary place that it ought to occupy in our religious consciousness, love of God, love of Torah, love of family, and love of humanity.

*Al shivyon* - on equality. The very first chapter of the Torah teaches that all human beings are created in the image of God. The ordination of women and the full enlistment of women in the project of Jewish leadership, decision making, and spirituality bring us closer to the actualization of that principle of fundamental equality and human dignity.

*U-shleimut* - and wholeness. If God is presented in Shir ha-Shirim Rabba as *ha-Melekh she-ha-Shalom lo* - the King whose domain is peace - the feminine noun *shleimut* urges us to consider the *havaya she-ha-shleimut la* - the divine being defined by wholeness and inclusivity in religious and social life. The principle of *shleimut* urges us in our democratic modern times to embrace and develop a more gender-inclusive theology, liturgy, social view, and religious practice that stand for true wholeness and peace in our community and our world.

## **Ninth Annual Semikha Ceremony**

### **Rabbi Dr. Daniel Sperber**

### **Posek HaYeshiva**



All the Hebrew books have as their first page a picture of a gateway. It's called a *sha'ar*. And the beginnings of books are now called *shearei ha-sefarim*.

One entered into the world of Torah, into the world of the books of Torah through that gateway - that *sha'ar* - and one entered into a new edifice, an edifice that has many rooms. And each of those rooms had a *sha'ar* - a gateway to go through. One went through these various gateways, each time increasing one's understanding and depth in the understanding of Torah and *Halakha* and *pesika*.

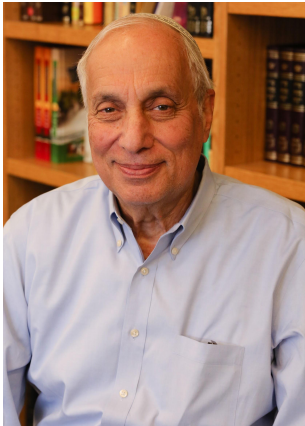
You are beginning now on a long and adventurous undertaking, having gone through the first gateway - the first *sha'ar* - and you will continue to go through the various rooms, deepening your understanding of Halakha and the practical rabbinics.

I can only wish you all the blessings of God, that you continue on this important journey - important because it will help *Am Yisrael* so that you can succeed in your aspirations to be important, rabbinic personalities.

## **Ninth Annual Semikha Ceremony**

### **Rabbi Avi Weiss**

### **Co-Founder**



[*Tov lehodot, lehodot la-Shem*]

In solidarity with Medinat Israel, *Tzva ha-Hagana Le-Yisrael*, with the neshama of little five-year-old Adi; in the hope that Hadar Goldin's body be returned; in endless appreciation for Rabba Sara; and with great thanks to our rosh ha-yeshiva, Rav Jeff, and our rosh yeshiva, Rabbanit Devora, our entire faculty, Abigail, the chairperson of our board, and all of our supporters; and in memory of Marilyn Belz, *zikhrona livrakha*, grandmother of Ariel; and in overflowing love, spilling over - *kosi revaya* - for those receiving semikha, *taf shin pei alef*, 5,781.

Tanya, Liz, Yael, Lindsey, Wendy, Lisa, full of gratitude to all of you, I offer humble blessings of what can be called "*birkat semikha*" - blessings of semikha.

Semikha appears in several frameworks. There is the semikha of the sacrificial service, which has been the subject for many months of the Daf Yomi. The Torah says: "*Ve-samakh et yado*." And *nashim somkhot reshut*. So it could be: "*Ve-samakh et yada*." Our *rosh*, the hands are placed semikha style on top of the korban. This is the semikha through which one tries to reach higher and higher towards greater, greater purification, greater *tehora*.

I bless you all with the semikha of *ali*. *Ali*. Reach higher and higher. Foundational to reaching others is we have to transcend and reach within ourselves, striving. *Alei, alei*, reaching higher and higher.

And then there is the semikha of giving authority to others to be decisors of Halakha, decisors of Jewish law, your semikha today. *Tore, Tore be-Issur ve-Heteir*. But I offer a blessing that it be a semikha of *Tore, Tore*, of *Torat ahava*. Let it be a decisor of law that knows the law, but let it be overflowing with love.



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Let it be a loving Torah. A loving Torah? Loving is a verb, how we love the Torah, and it's also an adjective, that the Torah is so very, very loving, how we desperately need rabbis who know Halakha but see Torah as God's love story, love story to Am Yisrael and for the entire world.

And finally, there is the semikha of the loving *berakhot* that we give to our children every Friday night. Leil Shabbat, we gently place our hands - *semikha* - on our children, and in the spirit, we bless them. And in that spirit, all of us, all the rabbeyim and the faculty and administration, we all bless you. We bless each and every one of you.

Tanya, Liz, Yael, Lindsey, Wendy, Lisa: it's your time. Go out there. Impact on Yisrael. Inspire the world. Bring light to darkness, always, always in gratitude to God.

*[Tov lehodot la-Shem. Tov lehodot la-Shem, lezamer le-shimkha elyon. Tov lehodot la-Shem, lehodot la-Shem. lezamer le-shimkha elyon, lehagid ba-boker, ba-boker khasdekha ve-emunatkha ba-leilot. Lehagid ba-boker, ba-boker khasdekha ve-emunatkha ba-leilot.]*

Mazel tov, mazel tov.

## **Ninth Annual Semikha Ceremony**

### **Abigail Tambor**

### **Executive Board Chair**

Thank you so much for joining us today and every day to celebrate these amazing leaders and this extraordinary endeavor. This has been a year like no other, a year of loss for many and disruption for all. But if we are wise, nimble, and creative, this year of disarray can be a portal to a new beginning. In the words of JRR Tolkien, "From the ashes, a fire shall be woken. A light from the shadows shall spring." I will leave the Torah to the experts.

In our 12th year, Maharat is ready for her next phase of growth. Our board, in collaboration with our faculty and staff, has adopted a new strategic plan that will guide us as we seek to broaden our reach, support our growth, and solidify our success. We will continue to invest deeply in our programs and create a new model of 21st-century leadership for the Jewish community around the world that is learned, compassionate, and inclusive. We will seek new avenues to bring the Torah of Maharat to the world, a Torah of compassion, wisdom, and intelligence, a Torah that meets people where they are and invites them in. We strive to create leaders for the community of today and for the community that we envision for tomorrow. That is our goal. And we hope we can count on your continued support as we nurture the spark of this holy experiment.

Please join us, not just today, but every day. For without you, our stakeholders, our congregants, our students, our lay leaders, our family, and our friends, we are nothing more than an idea. With your financial support, we become a reality and a new tomorrow, a bright light springing from the shadows.

Mazal tov to our esteemed and beloved musmakhot. On behalf of myself and the board, I wish you every success and *khayil*. May your work bring you joy and satisfaction as it brings joy and satisfaction to all you serve.

Mazal tov to our alumni. Your ranks are growing, and the multitude we have envisioned is becoming a reality before our collective eyes. We all relish your successes. Thanks to your commitment and your



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example, communities around the world are acknowledging the learning and leadership of women. Titles are being embraced and applied more widely as more women demand the recognition they and their learning deserve.

Mazal tov to our faculty and staff. The fruits of your labor are before you, and, by God, they are good.

Mazal tov to our board. Your tireless efforts and wise counsel have brought us to this illustrious time.

Mazal tov to our founders, Rav Avi and Rabba Sara. Your vision has changed the face of the world. Thank you for sharing this vision with us.

And to you all, mazal tov. May this be a time of unity, growth, serenity, and peace. May we all continue to be united in effort and purpose.

Amen.