

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



*"Yoru mispatekha le-Ya'akov ve-Toratka 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-Olamו ela 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 *"yuru 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.



dedicated learning. dynamic leadership.

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.