Wow.

I have been thinking about today, the day of my graduation, for four years. For the first three years, I was fairly certain that today wouldn’t actually come. It seemed far too surreal to possibly be true. It was only over this past year, my fourth and final year at Yeshivat Maharat, that I started to understand that I was actually going to graduate. On June 16th 2013 I would become a Maharat.

As I stand here today, I can’t help but think of one of my favorite Jewish texts - a commentary from the Chizkuni on Shemot 19:17. In this chapter of Exodus, the Israelites receive the Torah in the desert after they have fled Egypt. The build up to this moment is incredibly intense, and conveys the seriousness of what is about to happen. Verse 17 describes the morning of matan Torah - there is thunder, and lightning, and loud shofar blasts. And how do the Israelites respond? ויחרד כל העם - the whole nation trembled. One could assume that they trembled out of fear, that they were terrified by the situation. But, the Chizkuni tells us, this trembling was not an expression of trepidation. It was an explosion of anticipatory excitement. The Israelites were eager. They heard these loud noises and jumped out of bed, ready to receive God’s commandments upon themselves.

In some ways, I see today as my own Matan Torah. It’s a moment that I have been building towards for a long time. It is a moment that brings with it a major shift in my life, and a transformation in my identity. No, there is no thunder and lightning, but there are cameras, and, thank God, hundred of faces in the crowd. It is a moment that many could see as intimidating, overwhelming, and perhaps terrifying. And, I have to admit, four years ago, when I started at Yeshivat Maharat, I was a bit afraid. I did not know what the future would hold. But, today as I stand before all of you, I am no longer afraid. Instead, like the Israelites, I am excited, and eager to embrace what comes next .

I know that I would never be able to be here without the support of so many wonderful people in my life. I have spent the past few months making lists in my head of everyone I need to thank today so that I would not forget anyone. I feel so blessed to say that that list is too long to be read. So I make only a few mentions, but know that you are all in my heart.

To Rabbi Fox, Rabba Sara, Rabbi Weiss, and Rabbi Sperber - you have all dedicated so much of yourselves to do something you really believed in. Thank you.

To Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld for inviting me so warmly to join the Ohev Sholom community.

And to Mrs Zelda Stern for her vision of women’s synagogue leadership, and her generous support of my position.

To my fellow students - it has been such a pleasure to learn, laugh, and order lunch with you.

To the women who came before and paved the path for me to stand here today.   Many of you are here in this room. Thank you.

And I would also like to thank my family. They have all been so supportive and giving to me, and I feel so blessed to have you all here with me today. Thank you for traveling from near and far to join me.

And to my husband Yoni. The first thing I ever said to you was that I was a student at Yeshivat Maharat, and you have been on this journey with me ever since. I really mean it when I say that I could not have done it without your love, patience, and hours spent helping me practice my drashas. I love you.

Thank you everyone for sharing in this celebration today.