
SUPPLEMENT

Address to the Graduates at the 13th YCT Chag HaSemikha

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With the permission of the President, the Rosh HaYeshiva, the Founder, faculty and staff, my fellow graduates, beloved family and friends, and honored guests:

For me and my fellow graduates, this is a moment of tremendous joy, anticipation, and pride as we look forward to our future careers as rabbis. But that *simcha* is also tinged with sadness as we bid farewell to the community that has nurtured us these past four years.

Rashi comments on this week's *parasha*: "*Tov latzaddik vetov lishkheino*," "Good comes to the righteous, and good comes to their neighbor." While the actions of wicked people can create negative consequences for them and those around them, righteous people bring good to those around them, both through their actions and through the influence of their example.

For the past four years, my classmates and I have merited to be *shekheinei tzaddikim*, to dwell in the vicinity of righteous people, to learn from and with faculty, staff, and fellow students who are not just *talmidei chakhamim*, not just great scholars, but *yir'ei shamayim*, people of profound piety, and *ba'alei midos*, people of virtue and personal integrity, people who modeled for us what *avodat Hashem*, what serving God, looks like.

As good as it has been to dwell in the neighborhood of such *tzaddikim*, it is time for us venture forth to serve the Jewish people. We do so at a moment when many challenges face our people: established synagogues and Jewish institutions are shrinking; Jews, including Orthodox Jews, are growing increasingly disengaged; rising tuition puts a Jewish education beyond the reach of many families; and anti-Semitism seems to be on the rise. Together with all humanity, we face threats from violent extremism, rising inequality, economic uncertainty, and global climate change.

What can thirteen newly-minted rabbis do in the face of challenges of this magnitude? For one, we can start by doing the job Chovevei has trained us to do: inspire, give religious and *halakhic* guidance, build values-based communities, and be there for people in their moments of joy as well as their moments of profound struggle and loss.

More than that, we can meet the challenges facing the world today by being the kind of rabbis Chovevei has taught us to be. A world that sees religion as authoritarian and out of touch needs rabbis who are as good at listening as they are at speaking; who are sensitive not only to the intricacies of *halakha*, but also to the human beings who are impacted by the *halakha*; and who know when to say "I don't know." A Jewish world where women, LGBT people, converts, and people with disabilities continue to be marginalized needs rabbis who remember that the God we worship is "*avi yesomim vedayan almanos*," "father of orphans and champion of widows" (Tehillim 68), who will advocate for and be allies to the most vulnerable and marginalized members of our communities. A world that sees religion and science as irrevocably at odds needs rabbis who share the reverence for science and willingness to learn from non-Jewish thinkers of Rambam and the Rav. A world where religion is used to justify violence and extremism needs rabbis who are as compassionate as they are passionate, rabbis who can demonstrate love and respect for those with whom we disagree. A world where religious and political leaders commit ethical violations with impunity needs rabbis who are unafraid to acknowledge and learn from their mistakes.

My prayer for my fellow students, soon to be my fellow rabbis, and for myself is that, after four years of dwelling in the neighborhood of *tzaddikim*, we may now take the good we've received from our righteous teachers, friends, and colleagues here and carry it with us to new neighborhoods, to the communities and institutions we will be serving, so that, with God's help, we may become the rabbis that the world so badly needs, and so that we may help build a world that is infused with holiness, *kedusha*, with righteousness, *tzeddek*, with kindness, *chesed*, and above all, with love, *ahavah*.